

# CELEBRATING THE RETIREMENT OF AN SDMNY FRIEND, COLLEAGUE, AND A TRUE “CHAMPION FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS”

We have been honored to have many extraordinary people serve on our Advisory Council and assist us in myriad ways over the past 8 years, but it is difficult to think of anyone who has been more helpful or who has contributed more to advance the rights of persons with I/DD than our dear friend Sheila Shea.



Sheila Shea

For the past 17 years Sheila has been the Director of Mental Hygiene Legal Services (MHLS) for the Third Judicial Department. For those of you who don't know about MHLS, it was created as part of the court system in 1964 and provides direct legal services, advice and assistance to persons receiving care and treatment, or who are in need of care and treatment, from facilities licensed by OMH and OPWDD. Significantly, MHLS appears as counsel or guardian ad litem for people with I/DD in guardianship proceedings. As you can imagine, it is a critical stakeholder for us at SDMNY.

Throughout her tenure at MHLS Sheila has been a champion for the civil and legal rights of its clients and was quick to see SDM as an important alternative to guardianship when we began our pilot project in 2016. She enthusiastically agreed to serve on our Advisory Council (AC), scheduled an info session on SDM for the MHLS Directors, and a training session for staff attorneys, resulting in numerous referrals and, we hope, guardianships avoided. She organized a training session on SDM and SDMNY for the court staff of the Third Department and has brilliantly promoted the rights of people with I/DD whenever we have asked for her participation in webinars on SDM for the NYS Bar Association. As a lawyer, fellow SDMNY AC member Beth Haroules, council for the Willowbrook class, wrote:

“Sheila is a wonder, I have known her since I started at NYCLU so many years back as she was coming up through 3d Dept ranks, everything she has done so far is of the school of fighting for the rights and decency of all people and forcing courts not to look away - her brilliance, her perseverance, her determination, her resoluteness, all while so self-effacing... She has always been in so many places trying to pull all the levers at her disposal in aid of advancing the rights of people with disabilities.”

We are not her only admirers; Sheila is truly beloved across the disability rights community. Although the recipient of many awards over her long career, one in particular has special meaning for us. In 2021 the State Bar, through its Disability Rights Committee, created a new award “in order to honor a champion of disability rights who goes above and beyond in their role both on the [NYSBA] Committee and in their commitment to serving those with disabilities.”

The citation went on:

“The award is bestowed upon individuals who are fierce advocates for the rights of those with disabilities, and... who go above and beyond their role to champion for the rights of those with disabilities. It is not a yearly award, but is to be presented when warranted. Sheila Shea was not only a unanimous decision to be the first recipient of the award, but a person with unanimous support for the work [in which] she has diligently and tirelessly has engaged...”

Thanks to the advocacy of many, the award to Sheila was named after another beloved member of our community and Advisory Council member, Bernard Carabello, who was described as “a fierce champion for those with disabilities and a Willowbrook survivor.” We can attest both to Bernard’s importance in the struggle for the human rights of people with I/DD, but also to how happy he was to be associated with the award, and especially to the choice of Sheila as its first recipient.



Bernard Carabello

Now officially “retired”, Sheila is readying to embark on a long-planned trip to Japan with her daughter but assures us that she will continue to be active in disability rights and especially in helping families with young deaf children which has long been a passion. We are reminded that the Spanish word for retirement is “jubilación” and we could wish her no less as she embarks on the next stage of her life’s journey.

**CONGRATULATIONS SHEILA, THANKS FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE, AND JUBILACIÓN IN THE YEARS AHEAD!**