



## Wisconsin State Public Defender

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### Wisconsin Public Defender's Office Announces 2021 Award Recipients

**Madison, WI --** At its annual conference this morning, the State Public Defender's Office (SPD) honored staff and partners who have initiated programs, gone above the call of duty and skillfully represented their clients.

The Public Defender Board bestowed its highest honor, the Eisenberg Award, to Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Odyssey Beyond Bars at UW-Madison and Trinity International University for their work in offering college courses to inmates throughout Wisconsin. Named after former Marquette Law School Dean Howard Eisenberg, the award recognizes organizations who tirelessly worked to improve the lives of citizens involved in the criminal justice system.

Depending on the program, inmates have the option to take courses toward a degree. In fact, this past July, 20 inmates at Waupun Correctional Institution graduated with a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and a minor in psychology through Trinity International University.

"We thank these programs for making education available to a student pool that is often forgotten," said Public Defender Board Chair James M. Brennan. "These classes offer a vital lifeline to those seeking to expand their skills and opportunities once they return home."

Attorney William Donarski, who has devoted his legal career to defending clients and taking appointed cases from the SPD, was awarded the Berkos Award, named after long-time Public Defender Board Chair Danny Berkos. The Berkos Award recognizes a private bar attorney who has consistently displayed great dedication in representing clients.

Attorney Caitlin Hazard Firer, in the agency's Milwaukee Trial Office, is the recipient of the Chiarkas Award, named after former Public Defender Nick Chiarkas. Firer was nominated by her peers for exemplifying an unwavering dedication and passion to defend clients in some of the toughest cases, even during the height of the pandemic.

"The work of the attorneys and organizations recognized today is a great reflection on our agency and a staff that inspires me every day," said State Public Defender Kelli Thompson. "Our offices never closed during the pandemic. We had to find ways to continue to serve our clients as we navigated lockdowns, COVID surges in prison and a slower court schedule. I'm so thankful and proud of this team."

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