



Honoring Chief Lynn Malerba
2025 Constance Baker Motley Awardee

SHE LEADS JUSTICE presents the

**CONSTANCEN
BAKER
MOTLEY
AWARD**



2025



She Leads Justice, formerly named Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund or CWEALF, was founded in 1973 and celebrates more than 50 years of advocating for women's rights.

FOREWORD

A message from our Executive Director

“—
| **S**upporting women through legal education is not just about knowing the law—it's about knowing your power. When women are equipped with the knowledge of their rights, they gain the confidence to stand up, speak out, and demand justice.

At She Leads Justice, we believe that every woman, regardless of background or identity, deserves the tools to navigate legal challenges, protect her rights, and create lasting change for herself, her family and her community. Together, let's continue to break down barriers and build a future where women are treated with the equity and dignity they deserve, in all spaces. Informed women are empowered women who know their rights. Women who are encouraged to advocate for themselves can become unstoppable in their quest to create the world that we all deserve to live in.

**Because,
when we center women,
our communities win.**

|
—”

Janée Woods Weber

Executive Director, She Leads Justice

TODAY'S EVENT

Registration and Mingle

Opening Remarks

Marinda Monfilston, Board President

Janée Woods Weber, Executive Director

Presentation of The Pamela Award

to Wendy McDonald, Legal Education volunteer

presented by Nilda Rivera, Director of Community

Advocacy, and Pam Ellman, Board Member

Presentation of

The Constance Bakey Motley Award

to Chief Lynn Malerba of the Mohegan Tribe

presented by The Honorable Dawne G. Westbrook,

2024 Honoree, and Constance L. Royster

Legal Education Impact Stories

Raquel Cartagena, Legal Education Client

Call to Action

Janée Woods Weber, Executive Director

Mix and Mingle

MISSION/VISION

MISSION

Using a justice and equity lens, She Leads Justice advocates for under-resourced, marginalized women in Connecticut. We work to close the civil legal justice gap, to organize women in communities for change, and to create state policy for women's economic security.

VISION

Women in Connecticut have the resources, opportunities, and self-determination to enjoy meaningful lives of abundance and well-being, free from all forms of oppression.

PURPOSE

We address racial and gender inequities as well as advance the rights, opportunities, and status of women across the state of Connecticut through community-centered grassroots advocacy, direct-client services, and policy advocacy.

We center women in our work, with women of color and women living with low income being the highest priority.

Our work is intended to benefit women across Connecticut, but we pay particular attention to the impact on women who live in communities that have been historically marginalized, disinvested, segregated and excluded. In Connecticut, we know this means a priority must be placed on Black, Brown and immigrant communities in our urban centers, and also rural areas where a critical mass of women live with poverty.

The Women We Serve Through Legal Education

In 2024, we served

970 Women

In 2023, clients reported 544 times that they have one or more dependents in their households.

Clients reported more than 250 times that their household incomes fall below federal poverty thresholds and/or the ALICE survival budget guidelines for Connecticut.

Clients reported more than 700 times that they relied on public benefits like SNAP or fuel assistance to support their household.

People came to She Leads Justice for:

64.4%

Family Law (625)

10.3%

Housing (100)

8.8%

Employment (85)

2.7%

Immigration (26)

11.6%

Domestic Violence (112)

In Connecticut, we served

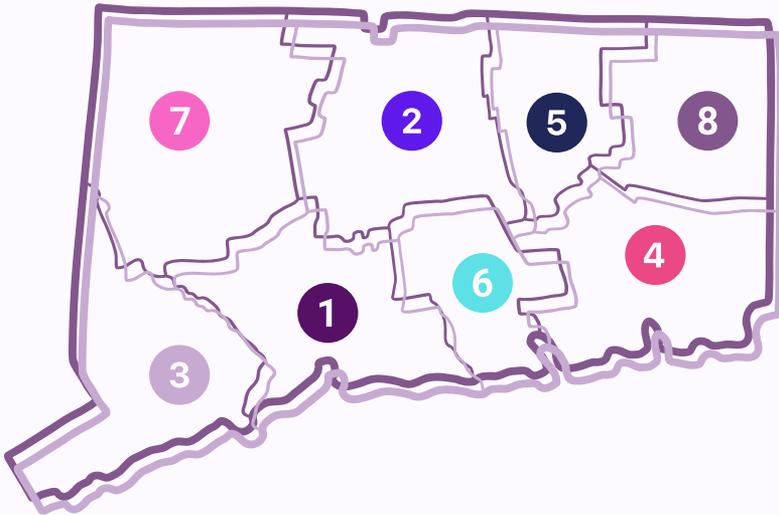
473 who are Women of Color

48.8%

109 people speaking other languages

11.2%

Per county, we assisted:



1 New Haven: 333

2 Hartford: 271

3 Fairfield: 140

4 New London: 42

5 Tolland: 45

6 Middlesex: 71

7 Litchfield: 49

8 Windham: 19

Impact Story

Rita (name changed) is a single mother of four from Hartford. Her children were being abused and she desperately needed a custody order to protect them. Unfortunately, she was not able to find the help she needed, partly due to challenges related to her low literacy and language barrier. Rita was scared to lose her children. She felt powerless.

Rita was then referred to SLJ for help. With SLJ's staff support and the attorney's assistance, Rita felt confident and empowered to express all her concerns and reasons about why it was not in the best interest of the children to visit with their abusive father. Rita's children are now safe and stable, receiving the professional help they need. Rita is seeking opportunities to improve her skills and financial opportunities to continue working toward the completion of her GED. She also shares information about SLJ's Legal Education program with other women in her community.

"No other organization gave me the warm welcome and support when I was in desperate need of help to advocate for my children.

I will forever be grateful. "

-Rita





Make a difference



sheleadsjustice.org/ways-to-give/





The
**CONSTANCE
BAKER
MOTLEY
AWARD**

Born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut, **Constance Baker Motley** was a trailblazing civil rights lawyer and leader and should be a household name not only in Connecticut but also across the United States. A graduate of Columbia Law School, she played a pivotal role in most of the major university and school desegregation cases in the South as one of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's principal trial attorneys - and their first woman attorney. Motley also represented Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Reverend Ralph Abernathy during crucial periods in the Civil Rights Movement.

Constance Baker Motley was the first Black woman to argue a case before the United States Supreme Court and established a stunning record of legal achievement. In the 1950s and 1960s, Motley argued 10 civil rights cases before the Supreme Court, winning nine. The tenth case was eventually overturned in her favor.

In 1964, Motley became the first Black woman elected to the New York State Senate. She also became the first woman elected President of the Borough of Manhattan. She broke barriers again in 1966 when President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Motley to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York - making her the first Black woman to serve as a federal judge. During her thirty-nine years on the bench, Motley handled many groundbreaking rulings, including on prisoners' rights, equal pay, hiring and access for women, disability rights, and many others.

She Leads Justice honors and lifts Constance Baker Motley as a feminist icon and a national hero whose service to the greater good of our country, especially women and people of color, is an example for all of us to follow. Naming our signature award after her is one small way we can contribute to preserving her powerful legacy for the future.

2025 Awardee



2025 Constance Baker Motley Awardee Chief Lynn Malerba

Chief Mutáwi Mutáhash (Many Hearts) Marilynn “Lynn” Malerba

became the 18th Chief of the Mohegan Tribe on August 15, 2010, and is the first female Chief in the tribe’s modern history.

The position is a lifetime appointment made by the Tribe’s Council of Elders. Lynn follows in footsteps of many strong female role models in the Mohegan Tribe, including her mother, Loretta Roberge, who was a member of the Tribal Council that achieved Federal Recognition for the Tribe and held the position of Tribal Nonner (elder female of respect) as well as her great-grandfather Chief Matagha (Burrill Fielding).

Prior to becoming Chief, she served as Chairwoman of the Tribal Council, and served in Tribal Government as Executive Director of Health and Human Services. Preceding her work for the for the Mohegan Tribe, Lynn had a lengthy career as a registered nurse ultimately as the Director of Cardiology and Pulmonary Services at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital. She earned a doctor of Nursing Practice at Yale University, named a Jonas Scholar. She was awarded an honorary Doctoral Degree in Human letters for the University of Connecticut, an honorary Doctoral degree in Law from the University of North Caroline Pembroke an honorary Doctoral degree in Science from Eastern Connecticut State University, honorary Doctoral Degree in Humane Letters from the University of St. Joseph in West Hartford, CT. She earned a Master’s Degree in Public Administration from the University of Connecticut and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the College of St. Joseph and a diploma in nursing from Hartford Hospital School of Nursing

Lynn was appointed by President Biden and served as the **45th Treasurer of the United States from 2022-2024.**



Prior to her current role, she served as the United South and Eastern Tribes Board of Directors Secretary. She formerly served as Chairwoman of the Tribal Self-Governance Advisory Committee of the Federal Indian Health Service (IHS), a member of the Justice Department's Tribal Nations Leadership Council, a member of the Tribal Advisory Committee for the National Institute of Health, a member of the Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee and a member of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Center for Indian Country Development Leadership Council.

Locally she served as a Trustee for Chelsea Groton Bank, Board Chair for the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, and on the Provost's Advisory Committee Member for the Harvard University Native American Program

She published *"The Effects of Sequestration on Indian Health Funding"* in the Hastings Center Report, Nov-Dec. 2013 and authored two chapters in *"American Indian Health and Nursing"* Ed. Margaret P. Moss, Springer Publishing Company.

She lives in Niantic with her husband Paul. They are the parents of two adult daughters, Elizabeth and Angela and grandparents of granddaughters Taylor and Charlotte and grandson Connor.





The She Leads Justice team fighting for women's economic security.

2024 Awardee



2024 Constance Baker Motley Awardee The Honorable Dawne G. Westbrook

Judge Dawne Westbrook earned her J.D. from Vanderbilt University School of Law in 1995, where she was awarded a National Nelson Mandela Scholarship and named a CLEO Fellow where she participated in the Council on Legal Education Opportunity Fellowship program at Georgetown University the summer prior to law school.

During her time at Vanderbilt, she was active in the Public Interest Law Group, the Black Law Students' Association, and "Straight But Not Narrow," an ally organization advocating against homophobia.

She earned her B.A. magna cum laude from Fisk University in 1992

2023 Awardee



2023 Constance Baker Motley Awardee Dr. Khalilah Brown-Dean

Dr. Khalilah L. Brown-Dean is the Executive Director of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life and the Rob Rosenthal Distinguished Professor of Civic Engagement at Wesleyan University.

Previously, Dr. Brown-Dean was Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Professor of Political Science at Quinnipiac University. She holds a B.A. in Government from The University of Virginia and a Ph.D. in Political Science from The Ohio State University.

Brown-Dean is the Founder of the Inclusive Excellence Teaching Lab, an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars with a demonstrated commitment to, and interest in, issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.



The Pamela Award is a new honor recognizing a volunteer or community member who has made a meaningful and lasting contribution to She Leads Justice's mission. The award is named in celebration of our esteemed and dedicated Board Member, **Pam Ellman**, who has volunteered with our Information & Referral hotline since 2018.

The Pamela Award shines a light on those who often work quietly behind the scenes—offering care, knowledge, and compassion without expectation of recognition. These individuals embody the spirit of service that keeps She Leads Justice strong and responsive to the needs of women across Connecticut.

Our team of Information & Referral hotline volunteers donate 1,000 to 1,200 hours of their time annually to She Leads Justice!

The I&R line is always free of charge and no one is turned away.

2025 Awardee



2025 Pamela Awardee Wendy McDonald

The first recipient of The Pamela Award is **Wendy McDonald**, a longtime volunteer since 2017 with the Information & Referral hotline. Wendy has donated hundreds of hours of her time to providing legal information and support to hundreds of women facing serious civil legal matters such as child custody disputes, divorce proceedings, and employment discrimination cases.

Through her patient guidance and steadfast commitment, Wendy has made a profound difference in women's lives across the state—especially for those who turned to She Leads Justice on some of the hardest days of their lives.



Special Guest



Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz

Susan Bysiewicz was sworn in on January 4, 2023, to serve her second term as Connecticut's 109th Lieutenant Governor.

She is a business lawyer and job creator who has helped over 60 companies access millions of dollars in capital and create thousands of jobs in Connecticut. She works alongside Governor Ned Lamont to champion women's health, education, and fair elections.

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz is an advocate and voice for women and girls, small business owners, Veterans, and many others throughout Connecticut.

From her advancement of policy to support women and girls to her participation in life-saving awareness campaigns around the opioid crisis, Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz is committed to her residents and their futures.

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Special Guest



Constance L. Royster

Constance L. Royster is the principal of Laurel Associates LLC. She is a recognized fundraising, education, non-profit, and organizational leader.

A lawyer by training, prior to her work in the non-profit field, Connie was a law clerk to The Honorable Damon J. Keith on the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, an associate at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, an Assistant United States Attorney in the Southern District of New York, and was a founding partner and managing partner at Cooper, Liebowitz, Royster & Wright— a major minority and women owned New York law firm.

Connie has served on the boards of leading institutions, including The Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, Fund for Women and Girls, International Festival of Arts & Ideas, Dwight Hall at Yale, Open Communities Alliance (OCA), and Yale Alumni Association and Fund.

Board, Staff, Volunteers

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Megan Fountain, Community Organizing Director
Nilda Rivera, Director of Community Advocacy
Tonishia Signore, Policy Director

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LEGAL EDUCATION

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Wendy McDonald
Sidra Soomro
Rayanne Suite

EVENT

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Erin Russell

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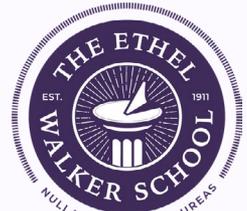
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YOUR GIFT MAKES OUR WORK POSSIBLE!

Without you we can't fight for women's economic security and access to legal justice. Give today, give monthly, or give in honor of someone you love.

Examples of what your donation provides:

\$35

Support requests for legal information through the FREE, BILINGUAL Information & Referral (I&R) phone line

\$50

Protect and promote the rights of women and girls through policy advocacy work

\$75

Cover one hour of language translation for Legal Education clients with language barriers

\$100

Support one hour of in-person advocacy, such as court accompaniment

\$250

Support building power for marginalized women through community organizing work

\$500

Cover the cost of one Know Your Rights workshop for the community



**Thank you for being
a champion for
Connecticut Women!**

sheleadsjustice.org/ways-to-give/

TIMELINE (51 YEARS)

Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund is incorporated in New Haven, CT.

1973-1975

CWEALF drafts and supports the passage of the **State Equal Credit Opportunity Act (P.A. 73-57)**.

CWEALF provides sexual harassment training for the **Rape Education Program**, founded by UCONN.

1980-1987

CWEALF begins a new Public Policy Research Program. **"The Economic Consequences of Divorce Study."**

CWEALF became one of the state's major in-service training providers on the topic of sexual harassment.

1992- 1999

CWEALF was one of five founding members of **Love Makes a Family Connecticut** playing a key leadership role to pass a co-parent adoption law in 2000 and legalize same-sex marriage in 2008.

CWEALF founded the **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Hate Crimes Project**.

2000-2010

CWEALF establishes the **Campaign for a Working Connecticut (CWCT)**.

CWEALF is the evaluator for the **Hartford Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative**

CWEALF guides lawmakers to champion **P.A. 18-8: An Act Concerning Pay Equity**.

2014-2020

An Act concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave was signed into law in Connecticut in June 2019. CWEALF led the Connecticut Campaign for Paid Family Leave.

The organization hires its first Black woman Executive Director, after only having white women in the role.

2021-2024

The organization changes its name to **She Leads Justice**.

She Leads Justice leads passage of **Public Act 24-8, An Act Expanding Paid Sick Days**.

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**Get
involved!**



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