

# The Paul H. Chapman Award: Winning the Fight for Justice

*The 2022 Paul H. Chapman Award recipients are all winners in the fight for justice.*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Fighting for the release of wrongfully convicted inmates, fighting for the passage of anti-trafficking laws, fighting for prison reform, and fighting for the Ukraine were the winning accomplishments of the 2022 Paul H. Chapman Award recipients. The [Foundation for Improvement of Justice](#) will honor this year's winners at their annual banquet in Atlanta, Georgia on October 1, 2022.



Paul H. Chapman Awards

Derrick Hamilton, co-founder of Families and Friends of the Wrongfully Convicted, won for his fight against false convictions [1]. Derrick was accused of a murder which he did not commit and was sentenced to 25 years to life. While in prison, he learned how to conduct legal research and became a respected adviser for inmates. Derrick helped secure the release of other prisoners and, in the process, he discovered a pattern of corruption by the police detective involved in his own false conviction. Derrick's research led to his release from prison and the exoneration of nearly a dozen others wrongfully convicted by the coercive practices of the disgraced detective.

Jonathan Potts, an attorney with Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner in St. Louis, was chosen for his tireless pro bono work in overturning the wrongful conviction of Donald "Doc" Nash for capital murder [2]. With his colleagues Charles Weiss and Stephen Snodgrass, Jonathan spent almost a decade on this case. In 2019, a special master appointed by Missouri's Supreme Court declared Mr. Nash "actually innocent." However, Doc Nash, a man in his 70s with lung disease, was still in prison when the Covid pandemic began. Jonathan and his partners filed emergency motions to secure Mr. Nash's release when the prison was under lockdown because of a Covid outbreak.

Dr. Nissi Hamilton, a survivor, leader and expert in human trafficking, was selected for her advocacy in the passing of the Texas Smart Act which was signed into law in 2021 [3]. This legislation provides protection and resources to trafficking victims and survivors. As a survivor herself, Dr. Hamilton has become a passionate leader in the national anti-trafficking movement. She is a sexual abuse counselor and CEO of Nissi's Network, a non-profit which aims to "provide holistic support for children of pimps, prostitutes, and victims of human trafficking so that they

can have an opportunity to lead healthy and successful lives.” Nissi’s push for legislative reform demonstrates the power of survivors to effect positive change in our justice system.

John Wetzel, retired Secretary of Corrections for Pennsylvania, was nominated for his prison reform accomplishments [4]. John has a proven track record of reducing jail and prison populations by releasing individuals who are better served in the community. John reduced Pennsylvania’s prison population by over 14,000 individuals without a negative impact on public safety. He implemented specialty housing units for people with mental illness and a first of its kind unit for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. Under his leadership, Pennsylvania was recognized for its successful reentry programs for juvenile lifers; the state’s corrections agency merged with the probation and parole departments to reduce costs and streamline processes; and Covid fatalities within the state’s prisons were lower than the statewide rate because of mitigation efforts implemented within the prisons.

Anna Afanasieva, co-owner of Laika Cheesecake and Espresso, was recognized for her fundraising efforts to help the Ukraine fight for justice and freedom [5]. Anna felt compelled to action watching Russia’s invasion of her homeland. From her bakery in Texas, Anna launched a huge bake sale to support the Ukrainian forces. In the first weekend, the bakery staff raised \$72,405 from citizens from across the U.S. Anna had unknowingly tapped into people’s desire to do something in response to the news of the unprovoked invasion. Having collected over \$200,000 for the cause, Anna has proven that anyone can have an impact on justice locally or across the world.

Derrick Hamilton, Jonathan Potts, Dr. Nissi Hamilton, John Wetzel, and Anna Afanasieva were chosen as the winners of the 2022 Paul H. Chapman Award after a nationwide call for [nominations](#). Their compelling stories inspired colleagues and strangers to nominate them. All nominations were submitted under strict guidelines which prohibited the mention of the nominees’ names, geographic location, gender, age, race, or any identifying information. The selection committee relied solely on the merits of the nominees’ impact on justice. Winning nominations were vetted to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in the blind nomination.

The Foundation for Improvement of Justice was founded by Paul H. Chapman in 1984. His vision was to use an endowment, left by his mother, to establish a foundation that would promote justice by recognizing and rewarding those individuals or organizations who made demonstrable improvements to the justice system. Since 1984, the Foundation has awarded \$2,860,000 to 286 medal winners from forty-three different states and Washington, D.C.

## Sources

[1] <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/20/derrick-hamilton-jailhouse-lawyer>

[2] [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/columns/tony-messenger/messenger-the-guards-thought-doc-nash-was-innocent-the-deputies-too-what-took-prosecutors-so/article\\_b194bca8-25d6-56f6-bb06-b040347802ef.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/columns/tony-messenger/messenger-the-guards-thought-doc-nash-was-innocent-the-deputies-too-what-took-prosecutors-so/article_b194bca8-25d6-56f6-bb06-b040347802ef.html)

[3] <https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/texas/texas-bill-crack-down-human-trafficking/285-17725873-40f7-491e-910a-06dceb9f3c2b>

[4] <https://triblive.com/opinion/joseph-sabino-mistick-john-wetzel-taking-his-common-sense-on-the-road/>

[5] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/03/09/cheesecake-bakery-ukraine-anna-afanasieva/>

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