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California Jury Task Force Receives National Award for Jury Innovation

Award To Be Presented Tonight At National Meeting

San Francisco—The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) tonight will honor the Judicial Council of California's Task Force on Jury Instructions as the recipient of the first G. Thomas Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation.

At special ceremonies in Columbus, Ohio, the NCSC will present the award to Justice Carol A. Corrigan, of the California Supreme Court, and retired Justice James D. Ward, of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Two (Riverside.)

Justices Corrigan and Ward, former co-chairs of the task force, will accept the award on behalf of Chief Justice Ronald M. George, chair of the Judicial Council of California, the policymaking body for state courts. At the time she cochaired the task force, Justice Corrigan served on the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division Three (San Francisco).

Appointed by Chief Justice George in 1998, the task force was charged with drafting legally accurate jury instructions in plain English. The goal was to make jurors' experiences more rewarding and meaningful by offering an alternative to the often confusing legal terminology that had been used in trial courts for more than 70 years.

The Judicial Council approved the task force's recommended civil jury instructions in 2003 and the recommended criminal jury instructions in 2005. The instructions are now widely used by trial court judges throughout California.

The national award is named for G. Thomas Munsterman, founder and former director of NCSC's Center for Jury Studies and an internationally renowned innovator in jury systems and research. The Munsterman

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Award recognizes states, local courts, organizations, or individuals who have made significant improvements to or innovations in jury procedures, operations, and practices.

“In making its decision, the NCSC Center for Jury Studies wanted to recognize that one of California’s most unique contributions to the area of jury improvement is its attention to the importance of understandable jury instructions,” said Paula Hannaford-Agor, director of the Center for Jury Studies. “Having understandable jury instructions is a critical prerequisite for jurors to be able to fulfill their legitimate role in the justice system.”

The new jury instructions are available on the California Courts Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jury/juryinst.htm, making them widely accessible to judges, lawyers, and the public.

The work of the Task Force on Jury Instructions, in operation from 1998 to 2005, is now carried out by the Judicial Council’s Advisory Committee on Civil Jury Instructions and the Advisory Committee on Criminal Jury Instructions.

The two chairs of these committees – Court of Appeal Justice J. Walter Croskey, of the Advisory Committee on Civil Jury Instructions, and Justice Sandra Lynn Margulies, of the Advisory Committee on Criminal Jury Instructions – will attend tonight’s ceremony.

The award will be presented at the National Conference on Pattern Jury Instructions, which the NSCS is cohosting with the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Ohio Judicial Conference today and tomorrow.

The National Center for State Courts, headquartered in Williamsburg, Virginia, is a nonprofit court reform organization dedicated to improving the administration of justice by providing leadership and service to the state courts.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.