



For Immediate Release

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**HEIDI NESBITT, PLSI DIRECTOR AND AILC ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
TO RECEIVE JUSTICE MARY WALTERS AWARD**

Albuquerque, NM – January 15, 2015 – The Women’s Law Caucus (WLC) at the University of New Mexico School of Law announced that Heidi Nesbitt, the Director of the Pre-Law Summer Institute (PLSI) and Assistant Director of the American Indian Law Center, Inc. (AILC), has been named a recipient of the 2015 Justice Mary Walters Award. The WLC presents the annual award to outstanding women in the New Mexico legal community in honor of former Justice Mary Walters, who was the first woman appointed to the New Mexico Supreme Court. Recipients of the award demonstrate courage, strong ethics, leadership and mentorship in the legal field.

Ms. Nesbitt has served as the Director of the PLSI since 1984; the program serves to prepare American Indian and Alaska Native students for the rigors of law school. By replicating the first semester of law school, the concentrated program includes eight weeks of instruction, research and study which teach the incoming students the unique methods of law school research, analysis, and writing.

This nationally recognized orientation program is centered on solid legal education principles. For more than four decades, the PLSI program has remained dedicated to providing training for students to help them develop the skills necessary for the study of law. When the program first began, only about 25 Native attorneys could be identified nationwide, but now more than 1,000 students have attended PLSI with a law school graduation rate of approximately 90%.

As Director of PLSI, Ms. Nesbitt has assisted hundreds of Native students, hailing from all over the country, as they prepare for the rigors of law school. While the program has assisted some students with lower than average predictors, it is also a preparatory program for students with GPAs and LSAT scores in the top 25%. Many PLSI students have gone on to attend top law schools. Part of the continuing success of the PLSI is due to Ms. Nesbitt’s expertise and dedication to every student that attends the program. Her diligence in bringing top law faculty from different law schools, selecting exceptional teaching assistants, coordinating law schools’ recruiting efforts, matching students with law schools, tending to each student’s needs and concerns, all within an 8-week summer is an unbelievable accomplishment. The AILC Director,

Helen B. Padilla, a PLSI alumna and former PLSI teaching assistant, states “Only Heidi can manage and orchestrate such a feat, summer after summer, and remain committed to PLSI’s goal of increasing the number of Native attorneys. Her impact on the legal community is immeasurable.”

A student stated, “I have witnessed first-hand the patience, humor, and unyielding grace Ms. Nesbitt brings to every aspect of her demanding position. Although she is not a lawyer, her work has been instrumental in progressing Native American lawyers, and thus, the legal community as a whole.” Ms. Nesbitt has helped prepare many future leaders, some representing their own tribes, or becoming law professors, others appointed to top state government posts, or serving in top federal positions, including several Assistant Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Interior (BIA). Importantly, many have returned home to directly serve their communities as tribal government officials or as tribal court judges. As a pioneer and a trailblazer for Native American students, Ms. Nesbitt embodies many of the same characteristics as Justice Mary Walters, and she is well deserving of this award.

The WLC also named the Honorable Judge Anne Kass as a recipient of the 2015 Justice Mary Walters Award for her significant contributions to the New Mexico legal community.

The Justice Mary Walters award dinner will be held at the UNM School of Law on Friday, February 27, 2015 at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$55 per person or \$400 for a table of eight. For more information, or to reserve tickets to the event, please visit:

<http://lawschool.unm.edu/students/organizations/wlc/> .

About the American Indian Law Center, Inc.

Established in 1967, the AILC is the oldest existing Indian-managed and Indian-operated legal and public policy organization in the country serving to strengthen, promote, and honor self-sustaining American Indian and Alaska Native communities through education, training, and leadership.

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