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NEWS RELEASE

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LAWYERS FOR ABUSED FEMALE PRISONERS IN MICHIGAN NAMED TRIAL LAWYERS OF THE YEAR

Determined Pursuit of justice in *Neal v. Michigan Department of Corrections* Earns National Honor
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The legal team that won a landmark verdict for female Michigan prisoners who suffered years of sexual abuse and retaliation were named winners of the Public Justice 2008 Trial Lawyers of the Year Award at a Philadelphia gala on Tuesday night.

Michigan attorneys **Deborah LaBelle, Richard Soble, Patricia A. Streeter and Shannon L. Dunn of Ann Arbor; Molly Reno of Whitmore Lake; Michael Pitt, Peggy Goldberg Pitt, and Cary S. McGehee of Royal Oak; and Ronald J. Reosti and Ralph Sirlin of Pleasant Ridge**, captured the nationally prestigious honor, which recognizes lawyers who made extraordinary contributions to the public interest by trying or settling a precedent-setting case.

After 12 years of litigation, the Michigan team won a jury verdict totaling more than \$30 million for the first ten class members to go to trial in the class action case. Neal was the first case to hold that Michigan's Civil Rights Act - intended to protect individuals against discrimination in public services - applies to prisoners. Moreover, after the team demonstrated the egregiousness of the state's conduct, the jury itself issued an apology to the female inmates on behalf of the citizens of Michigan.

For years, female prisoners in the state were subjected to groping, forced oral sex, rape, prurient viewing and -when they attempted to report the abuse - retaliation. The treatment of women and girls in Michigan's prisons at the hands of male guards had been described as tantamount to torture.

The dozen years of litigation involved fierce resistance from the state, answered by more than 13 orders compelling the state's cooperation with the plaintiffs and three sanction orders. At one time, the state went so far as to change the state Civil Rights Act to eliminate protection for prisoners. The legal team's challenge resulted in a ruling that prisoners are protected under the act.

In February, a unanimous jury found that a hostile sexual environment existed at the prisons and that the state had failed to protect the women from abuse. The jury awarded significant damages and the apology.

Speaking for the winning team, Reno told an audience of several hundred public interest lawyers and advocates that the award would encourage the lawyers for the remaining 49 cases against the state Corrections Department.

The Michigan lawyers were among 28 attorneys in three cases named as finalists for their committed work in the public interest. Twenty cases had been nominated for the annual honor.

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The other finalist cases and teams were:

Los Angeles Archdiocese and San Diego Catholic Abuse Litigation: More than 700 individual lawsuits against the Roman Catholic Church for sexual abuse dating as far back as the 1930s. Last July, attorneys **Raymond P. Boucher** and **Anthony DeMarco of Beverly Hills; Katherine Freberg of Irvine, Calif.; Stephen Rubino of Margate, N.J; Terry Giles of Houston, Tex.; Irwin Zalkin of San Diego; Timothy Hale of Santa Barbara; Laurence Drivon of Stockton, Calif; and Jeff Anderson of St. Paul, Minn.,** won a \$660 million settlement from the Los Angeles Archdiocese for 508 survivors of childhood sexual abuse in and, in September 2007, the San Diego Diocese agreed to pay \$198 million to 150 survivors. The settlements also provided for the public dissemination of long-secret personnel files of child molesting clergy, allowing the truth about the abuse to be known at last.

Perrine v. DuPont de Nemours and Company: Class action lawsuit on behalf of 8,000 residents of Spelter, W. Va., charging DuPont with negligence, public and private nuisance, trespass and other violations in connection with its zinc smelting plant, which released arsenic, cadmium, and lead into the soil and air. After nearly four years of litigation, **Mike Papantonio, Virginia M. Buchanan, Ned McWilliams,** and **Brian H. Barr of Pensacola, Fla.; J. Farrest Taylor, Angela Mason, Joseph D. Lane and J. Keith Givens of Dothan, Ala.; and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. of Hurley, N.Y.,** eventually forced DuPont to clean up West Virginia's biggest environmental disaster, winning about \$380 million for their clients, including \$130 million for 40 years of medical monitoring, \$55 million for decontamination of property; and \$196 million in punitive damages.

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