



Education Justice Lecture

(Proceeds benefit the Education Law Center)

Thursday, May 28, 2020



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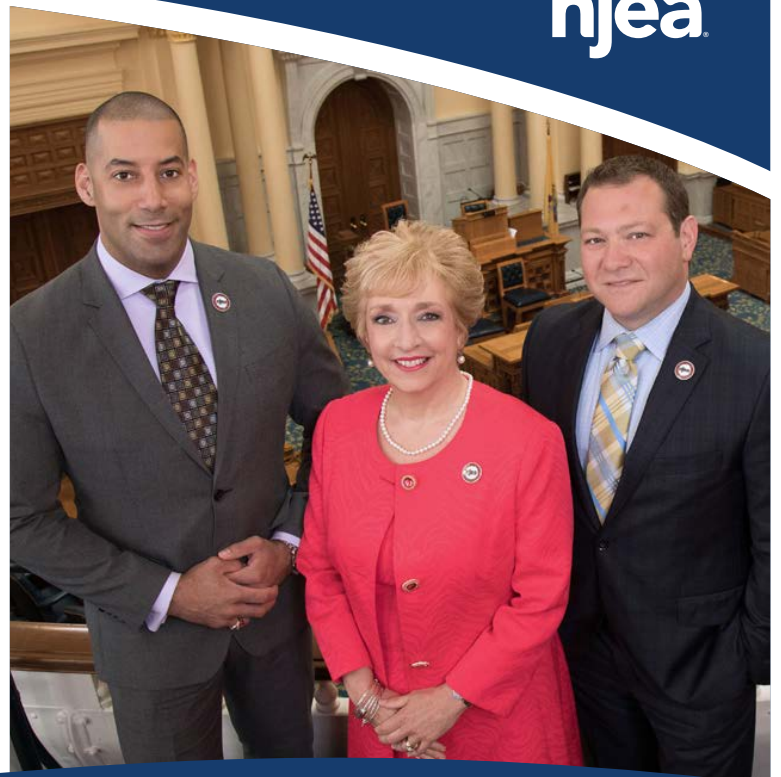


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to improve school funding equity and secure essential resources for all students. Their work is based on the belief that all children deserve the opportunity to learn.



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Education Justice Lecture

May 28, 2020

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Education Justice Award

Robert Jackson

New York State Senator

Education Justice Award

Billy Easton

Former Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education

Marilyn Morheuser Humanitarian Award

Benjie Wimberly

New Jersey Assemblyman



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Standing Up for Public School Children

Founded in 1973, ELC is the leading voice for public school children in New Jersey, and has become one of the most effective advocacy organizations for equal educational opportunity in the United States. In addition to direct litigation on behalf of disadvantaged students, ELC works to expand educational opportunities through coalition building, litigation support, policy development, communications and action-focused research in New Jersey, in other states, and at the federal level.

ELC's work is based on a core set of core values:

- All children have the potential to learn if given the opportunity to do so.
- All children have the legal right to a high quality education to prepare them for active participation in our democracy and economy.
- The quality of life in low-income communities can be improved, and the viability of public schools and outcomes for children can be strengthened, by providing children with the programs, resources and support needed for a high quality and equitable public education; and
- Effective and sustained advocacy is essential to ensure that all children have access to a high quality and equitable public education.

ELC's litigation and legislative advocacy, including the landmark rulings in the *Abbott v. Burke* case, have resulted in significant advancements in the provision of adequate funding, high quality early education, safe and adequate school facilities, and school reform for disadvantaged students and schools serving high concentrations of low-income students, students of color, and students with special needs.

Because of our expertise and success, ELC is now working to advance educational equity across the country, and our efforts have resulted in significant legal victories. In Flint, Michigan, ELC, in partnership with the White & Case law firm and the ACLU of Michigan, represents thousands of children who were exposed to elevated lead levels in Flint's drinking water and may be in need of special education services as a result. So far, attorneys have been able to negotiate a historic agreement with the state and school district to establish an unprecedented program to provide universal screening, and in-depth assessments when necessary, to all Flint children impacted by the water crisis.

In New York, ELC, representing parents from Albany, Yonkers and New York City, successfully sued NY State and gained the release of \$69 million in two-year improvement grant funds designated for 20 high poverty schools across the state.

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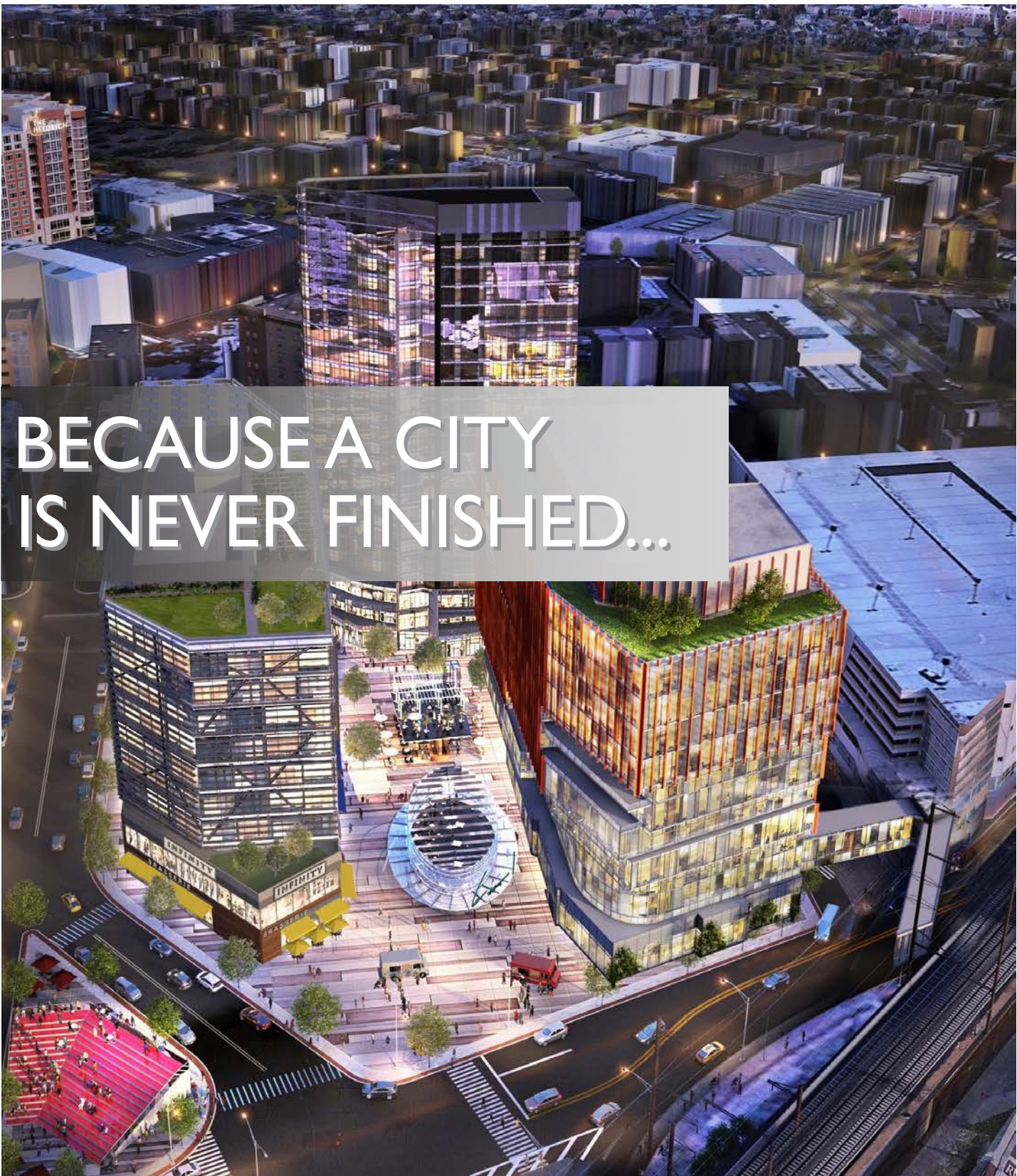
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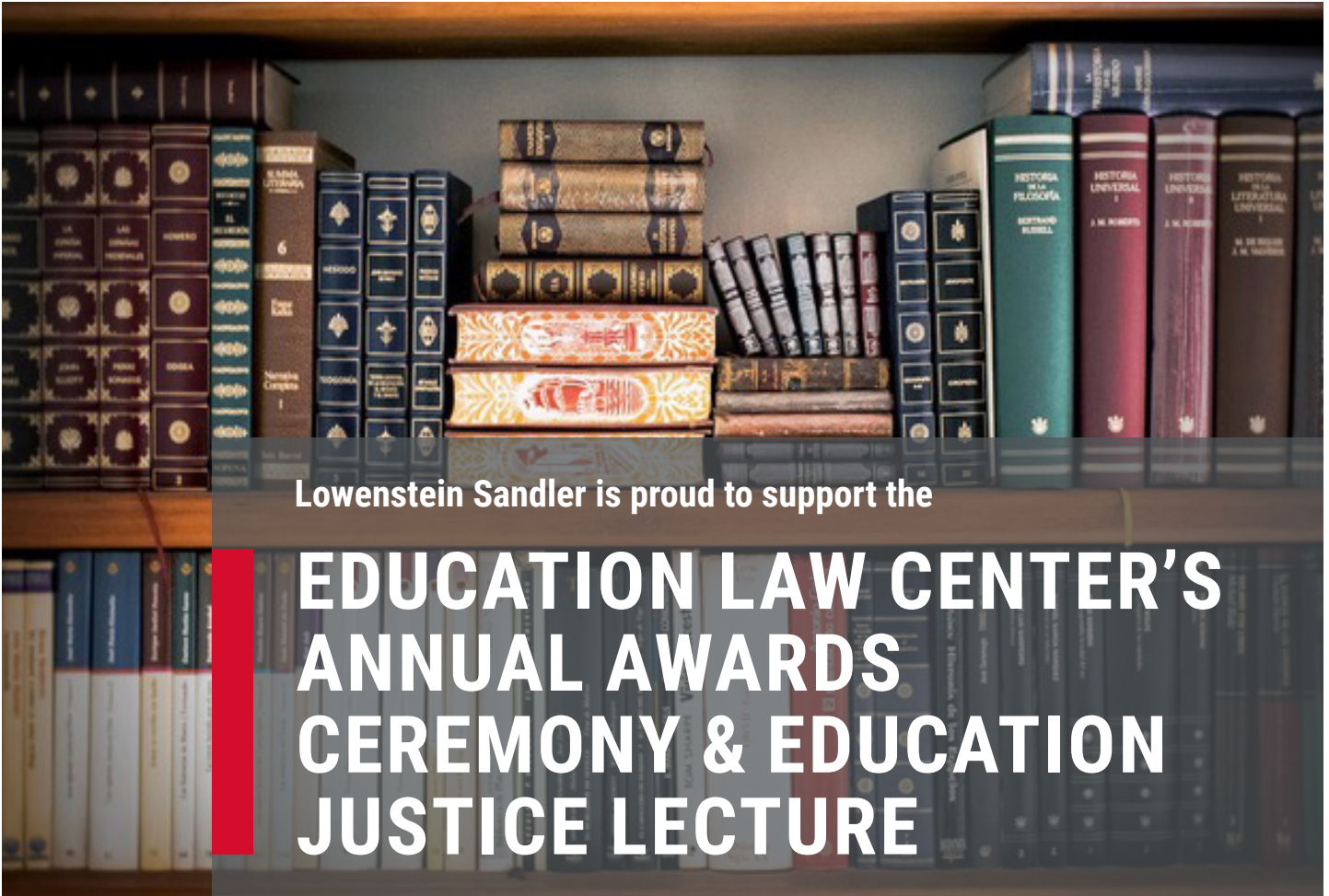


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EDUCATION LAW CENTER'S ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY & EDUCATION JUSTICE LECTURE

We congratulate this year's honorees:

- **SENATOR ROBERT JACKSON**
- **BILLY EASTON**
- **ASSEMBLYMAN BENJIE WIMBERLY**



Who was Marilyn J. Morheuser (1924-1995)

An influential litigator of school finance issues, Marilyn Morheuser was the leading attorney for the Education Law Center, Newark, in the law suit it brought before the court in 1981. When the case, *Abbott v. Burke*, was decided by the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1990, it mandated that the state provide funding for poor urban school districts equal to that of the average of the wealthiest districts, the first time in the nation a court had so ruled. A former nun in the Sisters of Loretto, Morheuser left her order in 1963. She earned a law degree from Rutgers Law School in 1970 and continued her life of commitment to children and civil rights as a lawyer. She became executive director of the Education Law Center in 1979.

Ms. Morheuser was the agency's lead counsel for the plaintiffs in *Abbott v. Burke*, a class-action suit brought in 1981 to challenge the state's Quality Education Act of 1980. Arguing on behalf of pupils of the poorest urban schools, the suit asserted that the state had inadequately responded to a State Supreme Court ruling on school financing in 1973. That rul-

ing said that New Jersey's method of school financing violated the State Constitution by failing to guarantee parity between the poorest and the most affluent districts.

The court – the state's highest – agreed with the center, ruling in 1990 that the law was still unconstitutional because it did not meet the educational needs of disadvantaged city children. It ordered that those needs be met.

The law center returned to court the next year, this time to obtain a compliance order, which the Supreme Court in Trenton handed down in 1994. In it, the judges decided that the state must increase the financing of the 30 poorest districts to a level where their per-pupil outlays would equal the average of the wealthiest districts by fiscal year 1996-97.

The judges demanded that schools in hard-pressed cities like Newark, Camden and Paterson be provided preschool programs, health services and smaller class sizes. The state has the responsibility to provide them rather than leave it up to the impoverished districts, they wrote.

Ms. Morheuser did not start her professional life at the bar; a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Webster College,

she first was a nun. She spent 16 years teaching high school and college around the country, wherever her teaching Roman Catholic order, the Sisters of Loretto, sent her.

Being of a rather radical bent on social issues, she decided that she could achieve more on the outside. She quit the order in 1963 and became an advocate for racial equality in Milwaukee.

In 1973, she received her J.D. at the Rutgers-Newark School of Law. Before she joined the Newark law center she represented such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ), the Urban League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Her work attracted many honors, including a Special Achievement Award from the New Jersey Education Association in 1993, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Award from the National Education Association in 1994. In May 1994, she was cited as Woman of the Year in Education by the New Jersey League of Women Voters. In 1995, she was cited as Woman of the Year in Education, by the New Jersey League of Women Voters.





Benjie Wimberly

New Jersey Assemblyman

Marilyn Morheuser Humanitarian Award

Benjie E. Wimberly, was elected Assemblyman of the New Jersey 35th Legislative District in November of 2011 and was just re-elected November 2019 for his 5th Term. He currently serves as the Deputy Speaker and sits on the Assembly Budget Committee, Chairman of the Housing & Community Development Committee and Transportation and Independent Authorities Committee, the Joint Committee on Housing Affordability, the Joint Committee on the Public Schools and Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity. NJ General Assembly Speaker has also appointed him to serve on the NJSIAA (New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association and the NJSETC (New Jersey State Employment & Training Commission). He has previously served as the Chairman of the Commerce & Economic Development Committee, Vice Chairman of Telecommunications & Utilities Committee, Vice Chairman of the Assembly Regulatory Oversight and Reform and Federal Relations Committee, the Assembly Judiciary Committee and the Assembly Women & Children Committee.


He is a 1989 graduate of Virginia State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in sociology. He holds a certificate as a teacher of children with disabilities from William Paterson University. He is the recreation coordinator for Paterson Public Schools and the head football coach for Hackensack High School. He previously was head football coach at Paterson Catholic High School.

Mr. Wimberly is a life member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., a member of the NAACP and Rev. Frank Napier, Jr. Scholarship Committee, as well as many boards and commissions. Mr. Wimberly has collaborated with his civic organization, TEAM HOPE, council colleagues and community agencies to provide the following services: expungements seminars, tax appeal seminars, foreclosure workshops, go green initiatives, clothing drives, dinner for the needy, toy drives, Project Graduation, Thanksgiving turkey donations and community clean ups, as well as the Jordan Cleaves Scholarship Fund.

Additionally, Assemblyman Wimberly has been recognized with many awards, citations, proclamations, and resolutions to name a few. In 2017, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award presented by President Barack Obama.

Assemblyman Wimberly and his wife Kimberlynn are proud parents of four sons: Justin, Jared, Jordan, and Jaden.

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Robert Jackson

New York State Senator

Education Justice Award

Senator Robert Jackson grew up in Northern Manhattan with eight brothers and sisters. As a student at PS 186, he never dreamed that one day he would be a New York State Senator. It was possible through hard work, perseverance, and the help of good people in the community. Teachers like his track coach at Benjamin Franklin High School, Irwin Goldberg, always played an important role. Mr. Goldberg pointed him in the right direction, making sure he went to college, and that has made all the difference. That's why Senator Jackson has fought so hard to knock down barriers and to make sure every child receives the best education possible.

As a Community School Board President, Robert Jackson filed a lawsuit against New York State to fix an inequitable school funding distribution formula that was cheating schools and undermining our children's future. He walked 150 miles to Albany to bring attention to the lawsuit and won a court judgment that awarded \$16 billion for NYC schools. As a result of this landmark decision and "for being a staunch advocate for generations of New York City children, for never giving up on the belief that education is a basic civil right, and for giving millions of city students a fighting chance," NY1 honored Robert as "New Yorker of the Year".

In 2001, Robert Jackson was elected to the City Council – and was twice overwhelmingly re-elected by the voters of his upper Manhattan district. Because of his experience, commitment and leadership, he was chosen to Chair the Education Committee and Co-Chair the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus. On the City Council, Robert worked to make sure every child got the best education we have to offer by helping to create more than 4,000 new openings for pre-K, fought to prevent thousands of teacher layoffs, and helped start the Drop-Out Prevention Initiative. He worked to increase jobs and opportunities by sponsoring a landmark NYC MWBE law and the Small Business and Jobs Survival Act, and he helped create a community people-power training program cited as a national model by the Clinton Global Initiative. He passed increased immigrant services, was an early advocate for marriage equality, and a leader in combating bullying. He fought for smart budget choices that kept senior centers, libraries and fire stations open. And he worked to make our neighborhoods safer by getting guns off the street through partnering with community groups, sponsoring Buy Back Programs, and advocating for stronger state and federal legislation.

In 2015, Jackson was elected District Leader and helped found the new, progressive, grassroots Democratic Club, Uptown Community Democrats. In 2018 he was elected to the New York State Senate representing District 31, where he has championed diverse issues from public education and criminal justice reforms to tenants' rights and climate justice. Born and raised in Manhattan, Robert and his family have lived in Washington Heights since 1975. He attended New York City public schools and graduated from State University of New York at New Paltz. He is married and a dedicated father of three daughters.



Billy Easton

*Former Executive Director
Alliance for Quality Education*

Education Justice Award

Billy Easton has over 35 years of experience in community, civil rights, union, and political organizing. For the last 14 years Billy served as Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education, New York's statewide education justice coalition. Under Billy's leadership, AQE played an instrumental role in winning a Foundation Aid formula designed to distribute state school aid based on student need in response the landmark Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit in 2007. AQE has played a leadership role in winning billions of dollars in additional school aid, securing funding to expand community schools, and winning the creation of New York State's full-day pre-k program. Billy has been a key leader in coalitions that successfully won two different campaigns to hike in taxes on the wealthy and multiple victorious campaigns to defeat private school tax credit voucher programs. He helped lead a campaign around the 2013 New York City mayoral election that succeeded in getting mayoral candidates to repudiate the market based education reforms of Michael Bloomberg. Through AQE's organizing work in new a new Code of Conduct and restorative practices were implemented in Rochester that resulted in a 40% reduction in student suspensions and improvements in academic outcomes. A similar organizing effort in Buffalo won reductions in suspensions.

Billy believes that grassroots organizing is essential to creating a just world. Billy, and his wife Doris, are parents/step-parents to five children and have three grandchildren.

GEORGE M. HOLLAND

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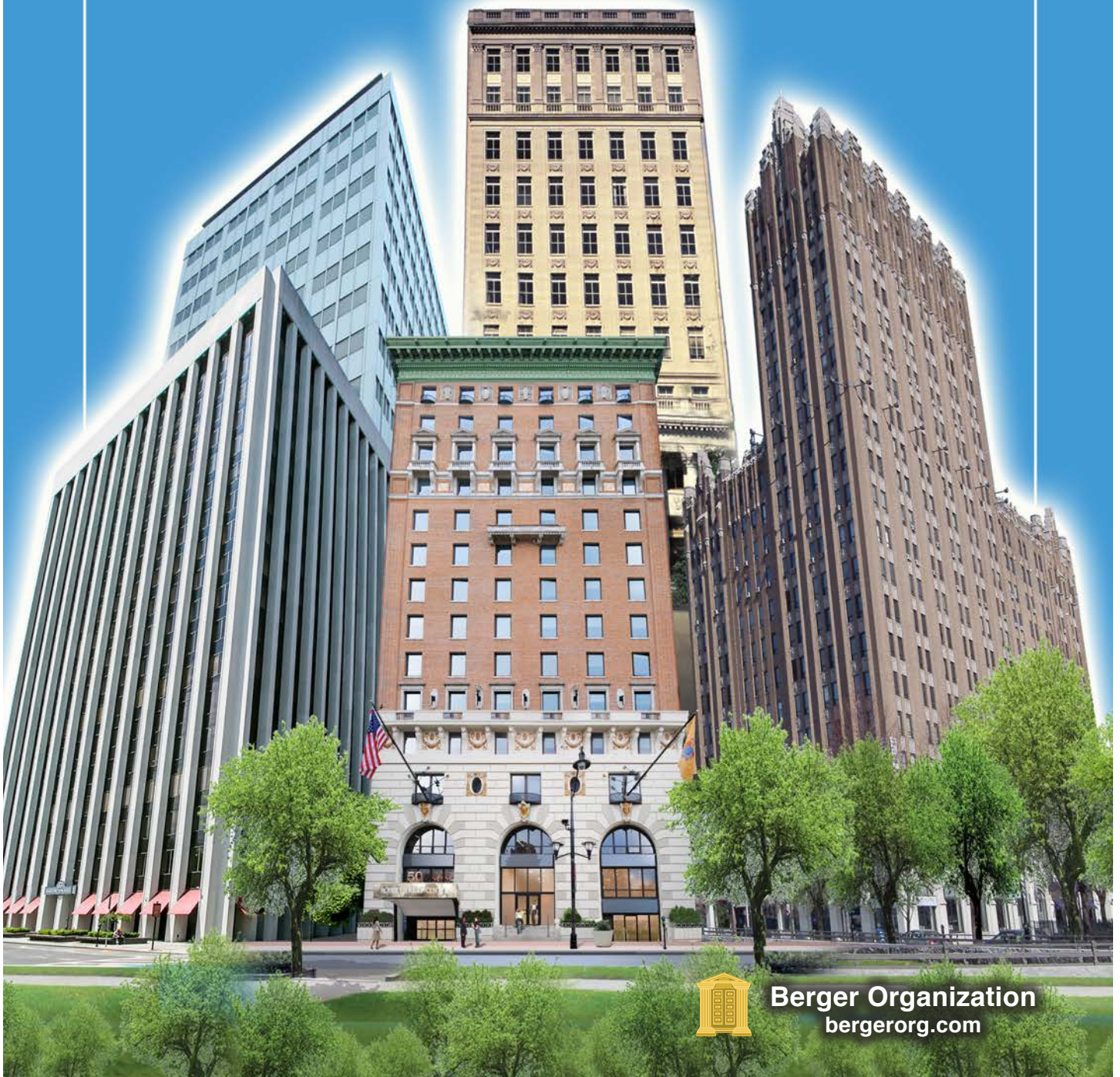
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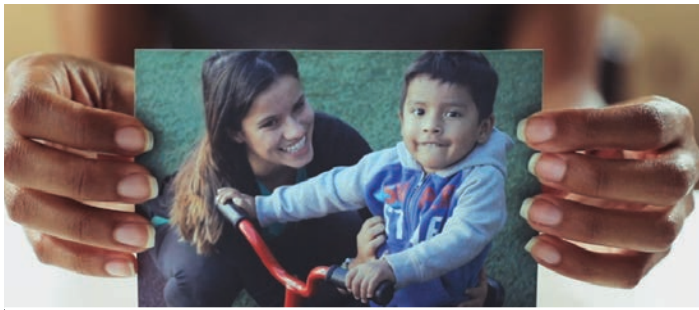
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