



2009 NAELA Elder Leadership Award Honors Sen. Edward M. Kennedy

Washington, D.C., November 7, 2009 -- Each year, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys chooses an individual to honor for his or her significant contributions to seniors on a national level through sustained exemplary service and actions. The Elder Leadership Award is one of NAELA's highest honors. This year's Elder Leadership Award recipient is Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who passed away on August 25.

Regardless of one's politics, it would be hard for anyone who works with older adults or people with special needs not to know of his commitment to and accomplishments on behalf of older adults, people with disabilities, and the poor. In the 47 years that Senator Kennedy served in the Senate, he was a steadfast advocate. His accomplishments are monumental and voluminous.

Senator Kennedy worked throughout his career to expand access to community-based long-term care for older adults and people with disabilities. Most recently, Senator Kennedy was instrumental in getting provisions from a bill he introduced, the Community Living Assistance and Social Supports (or "CLASS") Act, included in the health care reform bill passed by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. The provisions would create a new, voluntary, government-run long-term care insurance program. Eligible beneficiaries would receive a daily cash benefit to allow them to purchase long-term services and supports, particularly in the community.

In 1971, Kennedy introduced legislation to create a federal initiative patterned on volunteer programs in several states to feed the elderly, either with meals delivered to their homes or in group settings. Kennedy's bill established permanent federal subsidies for these programs and he fought over the years to preserve them. In 2007, 141 million meals were delivered to 916,000 individuals and 95 million meals were provided to 1.6 million seniors in community locations. It is estimated that over 6 billion meals have been served since Kennedy's bill was signed into law.

It's hard to overstate the many other contributions Senator Kennedy made in areas affecting older adults. Throughout his tenure, he was a passionate

advocate for funding for the National Institutes of Health. In 1971, Kennedy was responsible for legislation that quadrupled the amount of funding for cancer research and prevention.

For decades, Senator Kennedy worked to ensure that Americans with disabilities, including older adults with disabilities, could participate fully in society. In 1978, he cosponsored the Civil Rights Commission Act Amendments, which expanded the jurisdiction of the Civil Rights Commission to protect people from discrimination on the basis of disability. In the 1980s, he cosponsored legislation to require accessibility of polling stations and air travel for people with disabilities. In 1988, he introduced the Fair Housing Act Amendments to extend the Fair Housing Act of 1968 to include people with disabilities and families with children. In 1990, along with Senator Tom Harkin, Senator Kennedy introduced the Americans with Disabilities Act to prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring or discharge, compensation, advancement, and training.

In 2008, along with Senator Domenici, he co-sponsored a bill to eliminate discrimination in insurance benefits, premiums and co-pays for individuals with mental health needs, many of whom are older adults. He was also a steadfast supporter of the Older Americans Act. Many Medicare and Medicaid improvements and coverage expansions bear his imprint. The list goes on.

Senator Kennedy was also a strong believer in the responsibility of all to give back to their communities. In 1970, he was instrumental in securing passage of the Older American Community Service Employment Act. In 2009, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act was passed. It is both a tribute and example of Kennedy's enduring legacy of promoting volunteerism and service to the country he loved and the people he loved to serve.

As President Obama said of Senator Kennedy, "His ideas and ideals are stamped on scores of laws and reflected in millions of lives – in seniors who know new dignity, in families that know new opportunity, in children who know education's promise, and in all who can pursue their dream in an America that is more equal and more just – including myself."

It's clear that this year's Elder Leadership Award could go to no other. We honor Senator Kennedy's enormous contributions to our clients and our nation.

About NAELA Established in 1987, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) is a non-profit association that assists lawyers, bar organizations and others. Members of NAELA are attorneys who are experienced and trained in working with the legal problems of aging

Americans and individuals of all ages with disabilities. The mission of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys is to establish NAELA members as the premier providers of legal advocacy, guidance and services to enhance the lives of people with special needs and people as they age. NAELA currently has more than 4,000 members across the U.S., Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.NAELA.org or call 703-942-5711.