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HOUSTON THE ★ CAUCUS

50TH ANNIVERSARY
EQUALITY
BRUNCH

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

The graphic features a vibrant, abstract background of red, orange, yellow, and blue splatters. A gold-colored rectangular border frames the text. The text is in a clean, sans-serif font, with '50TH' in a large, gold-outlined font.

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PROGRAM

**Welcome and
President's Remarks**.....Austin Davis Ruiz

Keynote Speaker.....Lauren Ashley Simmons
State Representative HD-146

AWARD PRESENTATIONS

AppealAustin Davis Ruiz

FINAL AWARDS

Closing Remarks.....Austin Davis Ruiz

2025 AWARD RECIPIENTS

**Jim Owens Newcomer
of the Year Award**
Sophie Adams

**Annise D. Parker
Public Service Award**
Council Member Mario Castillo

**Barbara Cigainero Volunteer
of the Year Award**
Sandra G. Moore

**George Thomas "Mickey"
Leland Humanitarian Award**
Judge Shannon Baldwin

**Jim Cotton
President's Award**
Avery Belyeu

**Bayard Rustin
Civil Rights Award**
Texas House Democrats

**Monica K. Roberts
Trans Advocacy Award**
Autumn Lauener

**Eleanor Tinsley Ally
of the Year Award**
State Rep. Jon Rosenthal

**Kristen Capps Social
Conscience Award**
State Sen. Molly Cook

**Don Hrachovy Lifetime
Achievement Award**
Pokey Anderson

AWARD RECIPIENT BIOS



SOPHIE ADAMS

Sophie Adams has been an organizer everywhere she's called home. She earned her B.A. in global health and political science at Allegheny College and immediately started working on electoral politics.

As a staffer and volunteer on campaigns from city council to the U.S. Senate, she has fought for LGBTQ+ rights, immigrant justice, and workers' dignity. As Lauren Ashley Simmons' campaign manager, she led a people-powered campaign that unseated the incumbent with

65 percent of the primary runoff vote.

In her current role as a Community Affairs Advisor to Commissioner Rodney Ellis, Sophie brings her skills to amplifying the voices and championing the work of local communities. She strives for a world where people organize with strategy, persistence, and a shared purpose to build a more just future.

In addition to politics, Sophie loves baking, dancing, and playing board games. She has been a Caucus member since 2023.



POKEY ANDERSON

In June 1975, Pokey got three friends together—Bill Buie, Keith McGee, and Hugh Crell—to found the Gay Political Caucus (GPC). Over the course of its history, the GPC has had many names and is now known as the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus or simply “The Caucus.” It has been countless volunteers who ran with that idea for the past 50 years making it real, making it powerful, and making Houston take notice of the LGBTQ+ voting bloc. Pokey is the only surviving founder of The Caucus, and has made shaped much of

Houston’s LGBTQ+ history as a result.

She hosted the Breakthrough radio show for thirteen years, she co-owned Inklings Bookshop (1989-1999) with former Mayor Annise Parker, she was part of Hazelwitch Productions, producing concerts focusing on lesbian artists and audiences. In 1977, Pokey was invited to the first-ever White House meeting on gay/lesbian rights and served as a delegate to the International Women’s Year (IWY) conference held in Houston. She also served on the National Gay Task Force’s lesbian resolution initiative that was passed by thousands IWY delegates.



SHANNON BALDWIN

The Honorable Judge Shannon B. Baldwin practiced law for over 22 years prior to becoming a judge. Currently, she is the elected presiding Judge of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 4. In her first two years on the bench, Judge Baldwin was elected as the Local Administrative Judge for the Civil and Criminal County Courts. Judge Baldwin also served as the Presiding Judge over all 16 County Criminal Courts.

In 2018, Judge Baldwin proudly ran for judge as a member of the LGBTQIA family and won! Further, she was honored to be one of the “Houston 19”, the largest group of African American women to run for judge in Harris County. Judge Baldwin embraced her intersectionality and is unapologetic in representing her true self.

Judge Baldwin joined the U.S. Army Reserves on September 23, 1987. Upon graduating from college, she was commissioned as an officer, 2nd Lieutenant.

Last but certainly not least, Judge Baldwin is a mother to a beautiful eight year old girl!



AVERY BELYEU

Avery Belyeu is the chief executive officer of the Montrose Center, Houston’s LGBTQ+ social services and community center. She has been leading cause-related work for more than a decade. A seasoned non-profit leader with a focus on LGBTQ+ health and wellness, her career spans suicide prevention and crisis intervention, public health, civil rights, and higher education.

Avery’s career includes leadership at civil rights organizations like: Lambda Legal

Defense and education fund where she served as a Regional Director; the federally funded Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention; and The Trevor Project, the leading non-profit providing suicide prevention and crisis intervention to LGBTQ+ youth under the age of 24.

Avery earned a Master of Divinity degree from Texas Christian University’s Brite Divinity School and a Bachelor of Science degree from Appalachian State University. In 2024, she was named to Out Magazine’s prestigious OUT100 List.



MARIO CASTILLO

Council Member Mario Castillo is a dedicated public servant, lifelong Houstonian, and advocate for inclusive, community-driven leadership. Born and raised in District H, his passion for service is rooted in the neighborhoods he now represents. His journey in public life is shaped by his family’s deep ties to the community and his belief that government should be accessible, responsive, and solutions-oriented.

A graduate of the High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Mario continued his education at Texas A&M University, earning a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a master’s degree in Public Health.

Elected to represent District H in December 2023, Mario quickly focused on initiatives that reflect his commitment to safety, leadership development, and civic engagement such as Resilient H, a districtwide effort for neighborhood level resiliency across District H. Through every partnership, Mario remains focused on building a Houston where every resident feels safe, supported, and prepared for the challenges ahead, and where every neighborhood has the opportunity to thrive.



MOLLY COOK

Molly Cook is a sixth-generation Texan, born and raised in the Houston area. She is a registered nurse and grassroots organizer.

She earned her nursing degree from the University of Texas at Austin, and her dual nursing and public health graduate degree from Johns Hopkins University.

As an emergency room nurse and grassroots organizer, Molly advocated for the health and safety of her neighbors, and she is honored

to continue that work from the Texas Senate. Texas is the epicenter of poor quality of life outcomes for our nation, and good policy can save lives. Senator Cook's experience as an ER nurse and passion for organizing are the foundation of her work.

Molly's community advocacy helped pass a citizen-driven amendment to the City of Houston charter, and she has been recognized by the Houston Chronicle as one of Houston's transportation leaders.



AUTUMN LAUENER

Autumn Lauener (they/she) is an autistic, transgender, and intersex social work professional dedicated to disability justice and trans liberation in Texas.

As Vice President of the Texas Transgender Nondiscrimination Scholars, they lead statewide organizing for trans-affirming policy in higher education and delivered public testimony 17 times during the 89th Legislature. Their work centers liberatory community building, treating relationship-

building as the core strategy for durable, accountable change.

Autumn partners with student groups and civil rights organizations to defend DEI and academic freedom across the state. Recent projects focus on usability: co-creating disaster-preparedness guides with disabled communities and working to build cross-state and national virtual coalitions. At the University of Houston, they founded the Disability Liberation Collective before earning their Master's in Social Work from the Graduate College of Social Work. Outside of advocacy, they wind down with poetry, sculpting, and annoying their neighbors with a harmonica.



SANDRA G. MOORE

As an LPC, Sandra has almost fifty years of experience practicing psychotherapy. Her work has been a great source of education and her clients a source of inspiration.

The Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus first endorsed her candidacy for State Representative House District 133 in 2018 and again in 2020...a genuine honor. This led to a strong emotional commitment to the people and work of The Caucus. Hence, Sandra has always volunteered to assist and support in

any way possible since early 2018.

Recently, Sandra has embraced non-binary identity at the age of 77. She had known since age seven that "something wasn't right." It finally became clear to Sandra why volunteering with The Caucus felt like home...because it is home.

Thank you for this wonderful honor for which I am thoroughly grateful!
- Sandra G. Moore (They/She)



TEXAS HOUSE DEMOCRATS

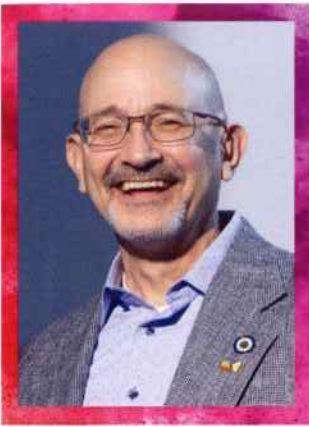
The Texas House Democrats—an official caucus of the Texas House of Representatives—are champions for health care, advocates for public schools, and are devoted to increasing opportunity for those they represent.

Their mission is to fight for real solutions for all Texans like fighting for the long-overdue expansion of Medicaid, safety of Texans during the COVID-19 pandemic, common-sense criminal justice reforms, fair redistricting plans

and many other priorities.

In 2025, Texas House Democrats broke quorum to block passage of racially-gerrymandered congressional redistricting maps that would give Republicans five seats in the U.S. House in the 2026 midterm elections. The quorum break ultimately lasted two weeks and galvanized a national response to thwart efforts to rig the 2026 midterms.

Texas House Democrats invite all Texans — regardless of party — to join in fighting for a better life for everyone across the state.



JON ROSENTHAL

Representative Jon Rosenthal (He/Him) has been in Texas since 1979. Jon is happily married to his wife Aminta, and they share two adult children. Rep. Rosenthal earned his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from The University of Texas at Austin in 1991, and worked for over 25 years in and around the oil & gas industry.

Jon became politically active in 2017, and in 2018, he left industry to run for office and was elected to represent Texas House District 135,

defeating a 24-year GOP incumbent.

Rep. Rosenthal is a strong and unapologetic advocate and ally, and accomplice for LGBTQIA+ communities – forwarding good bills and fighting against the constant egregious efforts to marginalize and demonize LGBTQIA+ communities. Named Freshman of the Year by the Legislative Study Group Caucus in the 86th Legislature, Rep. Rosenthal is also a champion for public education, access to healthcare, and equity justice.

Edward Jones

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Being part of the community means caring

Working together to make a difference in the lives of our friends, neighbors and the community.



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Financial Advisor

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Protectors of Equality

Commissioner Lesley Briones

Dignity Memorial/SCI

Commissioner Rodney Ellis

County Attorney Christian Menefee,

Odus Evbagharu, and City of

Houston Controller Chris Hollins

Leaders of Equality

Judges Shannon Baldwin, Jason Cox, Jim Kovach, Beau Miller, and Jerry Simoneaux

Judge Denise Brown

Council Member Mario Castillo

Harris County Democratic

Party Chair Mike Doyle



***SPONSORS
CONTINUED***

Leaders of Equality Cont.

Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher

Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia
and Lovett Group

Stephen Miranda & Blake Mudd
and Jeffrey Watters

Judges Hillary Unger, Sandra Peake, Michelle
Moore, Teresa Waldrop, Angela Lancelin,
Rabeea Collier, Damiane "Diane" Curvey,
Linda M. Dunson, Janice Berg,
and Raul Rodriguez

Friends of Equality

Carlos Aguayo

Scott Brogan

Judge Eric Carter

Judge Genesis Draper



***SPONSORS
CONTINUED***

Friends of Equality Cont.

Judge Phyllis Frye

County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth

Bryan Hlavinka

Eric Kirkpatrick

Katharine Ligon & Dr. Megan Mooney

Miroslava Mendiola

Judge Veronica Nelson

Michelle Palmer

Justice Margaret Poissant

Judge Erika Ramirez

Tom Seymour & Bob Burrell

Judge Leah Shapiro

Kendall Toarmina

Judge Fran Watson

Andrew White

Katie Wilson for the 183rd District Court.

Thank you to all that donated past the print deadline!

**2025 Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus Officers,
Board of Directors, and Leadership Team Members**

Austin Davis Ruiz	President
Brandon Mack, M.Ed	Vice President, Board Chair
Nick Vaughan	Secretary
Aaron Rublein	Treasurer

Porscha Brown, J.D., M.P.A	Thasia Madison
Hayden Cohen	Josh Mica
Chris Ellinger	Melvin Roberts

Judson Dunn

Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus Pioneers

Pokey Anderson	Lee Marsters
Bill Buie	Jerry Miller
Hugh Crell	Gary Van Ooteghem
Rev. Robert Falls	Robert Schwab
Carl Hayes	

Previous Keynote Speakers

1986 David Scondras, Boston City Council
1987 Barney Frank, U.S. House of Representatives
1988 Dr. Mathilde Krim, Cofounder of AmFar
1989 Steve Schultze, Mayor of West Hollywood
1990 Art Agnos, Mayor of San Francisco
1991 Bill Scott, Texas Board of Health
1992 Andrew Sullivan, Editor of *The New Republic*
1993 Torie Osborn, Executive Director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force
1994 Michelangelo Signorile, Author of *Queer in America*
1995 Donna Red Wing, National Field Coordinator, GLAAD
Jose Zuniga, Author of *A Soldier Of The Year*
1996 Jim McIngvale, Owner of Gallery Furniture
1997 Margo Frazier, Travis County Sheriff
1998 Kerry Lobel, Executive Director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force

Previous Keynote Speakers Continued

2012 Matthew Breen, Editor-in-Chief of *The Advocate*
2020 Pete Buttigieg, Mayor of South Bend & Democratic Candidate for President of the United States
2021 Malcolm Kenyatta, Pennsylvania State Representative
2022 Christian Manuel, Texas State Representative & Stephanie Byers, Kansas State Representative
2023 Liliana Bakhtiari, Atlanta City Council Member
2024 Jolanda Jones, Texas State Representative

Previous Equality Brunch Presenting Sponsors

2019 Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. House of Representatives
2021 Sylvester Turner, Mayor of Houston
2022 John Whitmire, Texas State Senator

Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus Past Presidents

1975-1977 Gary Van Ooteghem
1977 Don Hrachovy
1977-1978 Jim Cotton
1978-1980 Steve Shiflett
1980-1981 Lee Harrington
1982-1983 Larry Bagneris
1984 Norman Guttman
1984-1985 Sue Lovell
1986-1987 Annise D. Parker
1988 David Fowler
1989 Ray Hill
1990 Dennis Spencer
1991 Larry Lingle
1991 Toni Knight
1992-1993 Christopher Bacon, Esq.
1993 Terri Richardson
1994 Gary Van Ooteghem
1994-1995 Terri Richardson
1996 Pat Gandy
1997 Lane Lewis
1998 Rev. Burton Bagby-Grose

Past Presidents Continued

1999	Carl Smith
2000	Sean Carter
2001	Debra Rogers
2002-2004	Dr. Kenneth Jones, MD
2005-2006	Maria C. Gonzalez, Ph.D.
2006-2008	Jenifer Rene Pool
2009-2010	Kristopher A. Banks, Esq.
2011-2014	Noel A. Freeman, MPA
2014-2016	Maverick Welsh
2016-2017	Fransheneka "Fran" Watson, Esq.
2017	Frances Valdez, Esq.
2018-2020	Mike Webb
2020	Katharine Ligon, MSW
2020-2022	Jovon Alfon B. "LuJack" Tyler



AWARDS HISTORY

Kristen Capps Social Conscience Award

The Kristen Capps Social Conscience Award is given to a person whose deeds and life work exhibit social conscience concerns for the dignity and equality for the LGBTQ+ community.

2017	Alan Dettlaff	2022	Christian Menefee
2018	Kandice Webber	2023	Transgender Education Network of Texas
2019	Landon Richie	2024	Kevin Nguyen
2020	Chris Hollins		
2021	JD Doyle+		

Don Hrachovy Lifetime Achievement Award

The Don Hrachovy Lifetime Achievement Award is given to the person who has shown a life-long commitment to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Don Hrachovy spent thousands of hours maintaining the confidential mailing list, the cornerstone of the LGBTQ+ voting bloc. The dedication of this early Caucus president continues to inspire volunteers today. This award was also named the Distinguished Caucus Member and Tim Brookover as a lifetime achievement honor.

Don Hrachovy Award

Tim Brookover Award

1986	Cicely Wynne	2013	Marion Coleman
1987	Don Hrachovy	2014	Ellen Cohen
1988	Joe Thornton	2016	Greg Jeu
1989	Jack Valinski	2018	Bill Baldwin
1990	David Fowler	2019	JD Doyle
1991	Pat Hall		
1992	Ray Hill		
1993	Annise D. Parker		
1994	Eugene Harrington		
1995	Jim Owens		
1996	Toni Knight		
1997	John Kellett		
1998	Carmen Pollock		
2020	Monica Roberts		
2021	Ray Ramirez		
2022	Lane Lewis		
2023	Jovon Alfon B. "LuJack" Tyler		
2024	Kennedy Loftin		

Distinguished Member Award

2014	Kristen Capps
2015	Leslie Jackson
2016	Maria C. Gonzalez, Ph.D.
2017	Kristopher A. Banks, Esq.
2018	Jim Taylor
2019	Judson Dunn

Monica K. Roberts Trans Advocacy Award

The Monica K. Roberts Trans Advocacy Award recognizes someone who has educated, advocated, and created political change for the BIPOC trans community.

- 2020 Ana Andrea Molina
- 2021 Roxanne Collins
- 2022 Joëlle Espeut
- 2023 Adri Pérez
- 2024 Meghan Fairbanks

Bayard Rustin Civil Rights Award

The Bayard Rustin Civil Rights Award is given to a person who has advocated for the recognition and civil rights of the LGBTQ+ community. The award was created to commemorate the 1988 Silver anniversary of the March on Washington for Civil Rights and Jobs, is named after the gay civil rights pioneer who organized the historic march.

- 1988 Craig Washington
- 1990 Eugene Harrington
- 1991 Beverly Clark
- 1992 Sue Lovell
- 1993 Phyllis Frye
- 1994 Brian Bradley
- 1995 Keith Stewart
- 1996 Dale Carpenter
- 1997 Gary Van Ooteghem
- 1998 Annise D. Parker
- 2020 Black Lives Matter: Houston
- 2021 Harrison Homer-Guy
- 2022 Jolanda Jones
- 2023 Ian L. Haddock
- 2024 Rodney Ellis

Eleanor Tinsley Ally Award

The Eleanor Tinsley Ally Award goes to the distinguished community ally who fights for civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community.

- 2009 Garnet Coleman
- 2010 Sheila Jackson Lee
- 2011 John Whitmire
- 2012 Anna Milliken Eastman
- 2013 Shondra Wygal
- 2014 Jerry Davis
- 2015 Sarah Schimme
- 2016 Erika Richie
- 2017 Sylvia Garcia
- 2018 Alan Rosen
- 2019 Project Curate
- 2020 Lillie Schechter
- 2021 Al Green
- 2022 Adrian Garcia
- 2023 Lesley Briones

Annise D. Parker Public Service Award

The Annise D. Parker Public Service Award honors the public official who shows great courage on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community. This award was previously named for the first openly gay supervisor of the City of San Francisco, Harvey Milk.

Harvey Milk Award

- 1987 Lance Lalor
- 1989 Debra Danburg
- 1990 Art Agnos
- 1991 Bob Bullock
- 1992 Katy Caldwell
- 1993 John Whitmire
- 1995 Sheila Jackson Lee
- 1996 Garnet Coleman
- 1997 Debra Danburg

Annise D. Parker Award

- 2020 Mary Gonzalez
- 2021 Ann Johnson
- 2022 Maria C. Gonzalez, Ph.D.
- 2024 Abbie Kamin

Excellence in Media Award

The Excellence in Media Award honors members of the community for their significant contributions in media to the LGBTQ+ community.

- 2020 Isiah Carey
- 2021 Dalton DeHart
- 2022 Queer Voices
- 2023 OutSmart Magazine

Jim Cotton President's Award

The Jim Cotton President's Award is given to an individual who has contributed to the LGBTQ+ community in significant ways. Originally named The Caucus President's Award, it was renamed after Jim Cotton, who served as the organization's first Black president in 1977.

- 2009 Steven Kirkland
- 2010 Christina Gorcynski
- 2011 Kathy Hubbard
- 2013 Liz James
- 2014 Mark Eggleston
- 2016 Melanie Espinosa Pang
- 2018 Atlantis Narcisse
- 2018 Parker Sheffy
- 2019 Lorin Roberts
- 2020 Julie Mabry
- 2021 Larry Bagneris
- 2022 Alexis Melvin

Dennis Spencer Service Award

The Dennis Spencer Service Award, named after the 1990 Caucus President, is an award given for an individual's contributions to The Caucus and the LGBTQ+ community.

- 1991 Dennis Spencer
- 1992 Brian Keever

Dennis Spencer Service Award Cont.

- 1993 Kevin Davidson
- 1994 Cicely Wynne
- 1995 John Freeman
- 1996 Gary Grant
- 1997 Chris Bacon
- 1998 Jimmy Carper
- 2022 Francisco Sanchez, Jr.

Barbara Cigainero Volunteer of the Year Award

The Barbara Cigainero Volunteer of the Year Award is given to an outstanding volunteer who has contributed significantly to The Caucus. It recognizes individuals for their time, talent, and efforts given to the organization.

- 1986 Phil Batdorg & George Coe
- 1987 Carmen Pollock
- 1988 Sylvia Ayers
- 1989 Bill Willis
- 1990 Richard Prawitz
- 1991 Kevin Davidson
- 1992 Bill Willis
- 1993 Robbie Cavanaugh
- 1994 Lou Vanech
- 1995 Patrick McKee
- 1996 C. Patrick McIlvain
- 1997 Scott Tillinghast
- 1998 Dr. Clari Koepsel
- 2020 Luis Adame
- 2021 Christyna Lewis
- 2022 Pat Strong
- 2024 Neil Aquino

Jim Owens Newcomer of the Year Award

The Jim Owens Newcomer of the Year Award goes to a new Caucus member that has contributed significantly within their first year of membership.

1986	Jim Owens
1987	Lou Vanech
1988	Rev. Glynn Harper
1989	Harry Livesay & Michael Hollier
1990	Larry Lingle & Bill White
1991	Duncan Allen
1992	Carol Clark
1993	Terri Richardson
1994	Dale Carpenter
1995	Jovon Alfon B. "LuJack" Tyler
1996	Jay Seegers
1997	Robert Johnson
1998	Michelle C. Myers
2020	Austin Davis Ruiz
2021	Porscha Brown
2022	René Mendiola
2024	Alejandra Salinas

John Paul Barnich Award

The John Paul Barnich Award is named after the first, openly gay man to become a sitting judge in Texas (appointed in 1999). The award is given to those who make outstanding contributions to advance justice for the LGBTQ+ community.

2009	Phyllis Frye
2010	John Nechman
2011	Charles Spain
2012	Maria C. Gonzalez, Ph.D.
2013	Lou Weaver
2014	Noel A. Freeman, MPA
2015	Brad Pritchett
2016	Monica K. Roberts
2018	Ana Andrea Molina

John Paul Barnich Award Cont.

2019	Fransheneka "Fran" Watson, Esq.
2020	Steven Kirkland & Daryl Moore
2021	Shannon Baldwin, Jason Cox, Jim Kovach, Beau Miller & Jerry Simoneaux
2022	Jeff Watters

George Thomas "Mickey" Leland Humanitarian Award

Formerly the Caucus Humanitarian of the Year Award, this award recognizes an individual for their extraordinary humanitarian contributions to the LGBTQ+ community.

1988	Dr. Mathilde Krim
1989	George Thomas "Mickey" Leland (<i>Posthumous</i>)
1990	Carmen Pollock
1991	Bill Scott
1992	Dr. Clair Koepsel
1993	Ben Reyes
1994	John Paul Barnich
1995	Kathy Hubbard
1996	James Grace & Lee Masters
1997	Gordon Crofoot, MD
1998	Donald L. Skipwith
2023	Brian Klosterboer
2024	Martha Castex-Tatum

Larry Bagneris Leadership Team Member of the Year Award

Named after Larry Bagneris, the sixth Caucus President (1982-83), this award is voted on by the board and is given to the board member who has exhibited outstanding contributions to the organization.

2021	Katharine Ligon, MSW
2022	Mario Castillo