

The National Client Protection Organization, Inc.

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The National Client Protection Organization, Inc. Celebrates the Fifth Annual Presentation of the Isaac Hecht Law Client Protection Award



American Bar Association's 24th Law Client Protection Forum

Boston, Massachusetts

May 30, 2008

Isaac Hecht, a giant in America's legal profession, died in January 2003. Isaac—as he insisted everyone call him—was a graduate of Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland School of Law. He was admitted to the Bar in October 1938 and practiced law in Baltimore for 64 years. At his death, at age 89, Isaac was an active partner in the Baltimore firm of Hecht and Chapper.

By invitation of Maryland's high court, Isaac served as Treasurer of Maryland's Client Security Trust Fund since its creation in 1967. He served 18 years as a member of the American Bar Association's Standing Committee dealing with the support of law client protection funds in the United States and Canada. These unique funds, financed by lawyers, are charged with protecting law clients from dishonest conduct in the practice of law, and preserving the good name of lawyers for integrity when entrusted with law client money and property.

Isaac held the unshakable belief that the trust of law clients is the essential linchpin in every lawyer-client relationship, and that the reimbursement of innocent victims of lawyer dishonesty represents the legal profession at its best. To Isaac's credit, there are now client protection funds in every state and the District of Columbia, and in each province of Canada.

Isaac was uncommonly generous with his time and enthusiasm for the law client protection movement. He was a frequent lecturer and writer on issues dealing with legal ethics, professional responsibility and the management of client protection funds. Rare was the professional forum without Isaac at the speakers' table or front row. He surprised no one by his focus: the plain numbers in a fund's financial foundation; the initiative of its leadership; and its support of techniques to deter and detect dishonest conduct in the practice of law. But Isaac was also a kind, thoughtful and caring man, courtly in manner, and a raconteur without equal.

Isaac, with his loving wife of 62 years, drew few limits in their efforts of public and community service. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, Isaac and Kitty established a scholarship fund at the University of Maryland School of Law. This in addition to charitable funds at the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore; the Johns Hopkins Oncology Center; the Central Scholarship Bureau in Baltimore; Goucher College, Kitty's alma mater; and the Legal Aid Society.

At Isaac's funeral, his son Henry observed: "Two words about my father come to mind: love and passion, with which he lived every day of his long life." Isaac loved his family, his work, and his community. He was especially proud of his three children, Henry, Marjorie, and Eleanor, and his five grandchildren.

The National Client Protection Organization has created the Isaac Hecht Award to honor the memory of this national treasure, his professional and civic life, and his lifetime of public service. The award is intended to recognize an individual or professional organization that has demonstrated excellence in the field of law client protection. It has been funded in perpetuity by the Hecht family, and Isaac's friends and colleagues.

"Excellence" includes significant achievements in promoting public confidence in the administration of justice and the integrity of the legal profession; the substantial reimbursement of law clients for eligible losses; the development of programs to prevent and detect professional misconduct in the practice of law; and meaningful public information programs for client protection funds, attorneys and legal consumers.

NCPO's Board of Directors is honored and unanimous in selecting the Hon. Thomas J. Moyer, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio, as the 2008 recipient of the Isaac Hecht Award.

Justice Moyer is the longest-serving current Chief Justice in the United States. His undergraduate and law degrees are from Ohio State University. He has practiced law in Columbus, Ohio; served as president of the Columbus City Board of Education; as a judge on the Tenth District Court of Appeals for Ohio; and as an executive assistant to former Governor James A. Rhodes.

Chief Justice Moyer is a nationally recognized leader in providing citizens with improved access to the courts through alternative dispute resolution and computer technology. He is a former president of the Conference of Chief Justices and is in the forefront of efforts to strengthen Ohio's family courts; reform criminal sentencing; the qualifications and selection of judges; and the resolution of complex disputes involving science. He has spoken on judicial reform in China, Chile, Argentina and Ukraine.

Chief Justice Moyer is an outspoken advocate for effective law client protection in Ohio. Under his leadership, the Supreme Court routinely orders disciplined attorneys to reimburse the client protection fund for its awards of reimbursement to their clients. The Court is mindful and responsive to the fund's need for adequate funding, and the need to periodically increase the amount of reimbursement that the fund provides eligible law clients.

The Chief Justice has also been a stalwart supporter of the policy that a lawyer's failure or refusal to refund unearned legal fees to a law client is tantamount to the theft of the client's money. As a result, the client protection fund in Ohio readily provides full protection to countless victims who paid for, but who did not receive, legal services promised by their lawyers.

More recently, the Chief Justice, on his own initiative, has written insurance companies in Ohio to request that they voluntarily notify law clients whenever settlements of insurance claims are mailed to the clients' attorneys. Despite Herculean efforts in Ohio, the client protection fund has not been able to secure legislation or regulations to implement this important rule of professional conduct to prevent the theft of insurance and settlement proceeds.

By every measure, Chief Justice Moyer has demonstrated "excellence" in the fields of lawyer professionalism and law client protection. NCPO honors the memory and legacy of Isaac Hecht by honoring this distinguished American judge with the Hecht Award 2008.