



CITY OF OAKLAND
newsrelease
Office of the City Attorney

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City Attorney John Russo Receives Award for Anti-Discrimination Work

OAKLAND – City Attorney John Russo will receive the Legal Service Award from the Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF) during the organization’s annual dinner on Thursday, Feb. 28 at the San Francisco Hyatt Regency.

BALIF, the nation’s oldest and largest bar association for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the legal profession, gives the award each year to recognize exemplary advocacy for civil liberties and equal rights.

"As City Attorney, John made sure Oakland stood with San Francisco by filing an amicus brief supporting the rights of same sex couples to marry," said Rebecca Prozan, BALIF Chair and an Assistant District Attorney in San Francisco. "Throughout his career in law and politics, John has a long record of fighting for equality for the LGBT communities. BALIF is pleased to give him the Legal Service Award, recognizing his outstanding work to protect and promote civil rights for all."

As an elected official in Oakland, Russo has taken a strong public stance in favor of same-sex marriage rights for 12-plus years. As a City Council member, he authored Oakland’s Domestic Partner Ordinance and helped draft the City’s Equal Benefits Ordinance, which requires contractors doing business with the City to offer domestic partner benefits.

The Legal Service Award is going to Russo this year in part because of his office’s successful defense of Oakland’s anti-discrimination policy.

The challenge to Oakland’s anti-discrimination policy started six years ago, when two city employees posted anti-gay flyers in their office. After a supervisor ordered the flyers to be removed, the employees sued with the help of conservative legal groups. In a deposition, plaintiffs admitted they posted the flyers to convey their belief that homosexuality is "wrong." The City won in Federal District Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals, and in October the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case, upholding Oakland’s right to maintain a harassment-free workplace.

"It’s an honor to receive this award," Russo said. "In the past 30 years we have made great strides as a people, but the struggle for civil rights in this country is not over. Organizations such as BALIF deserve recognition for leading this struggle both inside and outside of the legal profession."
