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For Immediate Release

PHFA recognizes the exceptional performance of Pa.'s top housing counselors
Counselors educate consumers about making informed rental and homebuying decisions

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency recognized the work of the state’s private sector housing counselors today during a virtual awards ceremony. These counselors help PHFA achieve its housing mission by assisting Pennsylvanians with questions about rental housing, homebuying, homeownership, home foreclosure, personal finance and budgeting so they can make better informed housing decisions.

“Housing decisions represent a large portion of a person’s monthly budget, so it’s important those decisions are made wisely,” said PHFA Executive Director and CEO Robin Wiessmann. “Our housing counselors work tirelessly in the background giving people the training they need to make smarter housing decisions. Our biennial awards event gives us the chance to salute the efforts of these counselors and recognize the achievements of the best among them.”

Traditionally the awards events is held in Harrisburg. But this year’s hour-long event was conducted entirely online so as to prevent any possible transmission of the coronavirus. Housing counselors from across the state participated, representing 73 counseling agencies. The audience of counselors was thanked in brief remarks by Wiessmann and Richard Vague, acting secretary of the state Department of Banking and Securities.

The event began with the presentation of the Award of Excellence to state Senator Art Haywood III. His time working at Community Legal Services early in his career demonstrated his passion for affordable and fair housing and for the prevention of homelessness, which continues today.

Senator Haywood graduated magna cum laude from Morehouse College and has a master’s degree from the London School of Economics, where he was a Marshall Scholar. He earned his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1985. Following his education, in 2009 he won a position as a township commissioner, and five years later he was elected as a state senator to represent the 4th District.

In accepting his award, Senator Haywood spoke about the good work being done by PHFA in the areas of foreclosure prevention, promoting homeownership and educating housing consumers. Senator Haywood stressed to the audience how stable housing has the potential to change lives. He noted that significant challenges remain if society is to address the persistence of systemic racism. He encouraged the audience of housing counselors to continue their good work that is helping so many families find and maintain stable housing.

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In addition to the award for Senator Haywood, recognition was given to these individuals and counseling agencies exhibiting exemplary service to Pennsylvania residents:

Best Housing Counseling Specialist Award

- Diann Bolharsky, Center for Family Services, Meadville
- Carol Jurchenko, Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem
- Sandy McGeary, Advantage Credit Counseling Service, Pittsburgh
- Christine Medina, Clarifi, Philadelphia
- Michael Rapaport, West Oak Lane CDC, Philadelphia
- Randi Shober – Tabor Community Services, Lancaster
- Jonathan Weaver, Mon Valley Initiative, Homestead

Best Agency Award

- Advantage Credit Counseling Service, Pittsburgh
- Clarifi, Philadelphia
- Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem

Community Partnership Award

- Butler County Homeownership, Butler

Financial Education and Coaching Award

- Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem

Funder Partnership Award

- Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem

Lender Partnership Award

- Advantage Credit Counseling Service, Pittsburgh

About PHFA

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency works to provide affordable homeownership and rental housing options for older adults, low- and moderate-income families, and people with special housing needs. Through its carefully managed mortgage programs and investments in multifamily housing developments, PHFA also promotes economic development across the state. Since its creation by the legislature in 1972, it has generated nearly \$15 billion of funding for more than 180,750 single-family home mortgage loans, helped fund the construction of 138,000 rental units, distributed more than \$121 million to support local housing initiatives, and saved the homes of nearly 50,400 families from foreclosure. PHFA programs and operations are funded primarily by the sale of securities and from fees paid by program users, not by public tax dollars. The agency is governed by a 14-member board.

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