

MEDIA RELEASE

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Christy Respress and Jaiya Lalla to be Honored at 11th Annual DC Commission on Human Rights Awards Gala

District Community Leaders are celebrated during Human Rights Month

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Today, the DC Commission on Human Rights (COHR) and the DC Office of Human Rights (OHR) named Christy Respress, Executive Director, Pathways to Housing DC, as the recipient of the 2021 Cornelius R. “Neil” Alexander Humanitarian Award. The Award will be presented at the annual Commission on Human Rights Awards Gala on December 7, 2021. The Award is named in honor of the longtime Chief Administrative Law Judge of the District’s Commission on Human Rights. At the event, COHR and OHR will also award a new Emerging Leadership Award to Jaiya Lalla, Program Director, Global Classrooms DC (GCDC) program of the National Capital Area Chapter of the United Nations Association-USA (UNA-NCA), and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the COHR. The Gala is held each December to commemorate the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Ms. Respress has dedicated the last 25 years of her career to working with individuals who are experiencing homelessness and living with complex health challenges. She has worked with Pathways to Housing for 21 years, and has been in the role of Executive Director of Pathways to Housing DC since January 2011. She has extensive knowledge of “Housing First” and has provided technical assistance to agencies and communities around the world to implement this innovative model. She is an appointed member of the Mayor Muriel Bowser’s DC Interagency Council on Homelessness and serves on the Board of Directors for the DC Behavioral Health Association. Christy received her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from The Catholic University of America and her Masters in Social Work from Howard University.

“I’m committed to ending homelessness and dismantling the policies and systems that keep people in a state of homelessness - especially people of color who are vastly overrepresented. It is so wonderful and humbling for our efforts to this end to be recognized in such a challenging year,” said Ms. Respress.

This year, the COHR added the “Emerging Leadership Award,” a new award designed to recognize up and coming leaders in human rights. The COHR and OHR are excited to announce the inaugural award recipient, Jaiya Lalla.

As a Program Director at UNA-NCA, Ms. Lalla strives to close the global education gap for underserved middle and high school students in the Washington Metropolitan area on human rights issues, including gender equality, racism, and religious discrimination. Through activities included in the program, students strengthen

critical skills, including public speaking and writing, and are empowered to be impactful human rights advocates in their local communities. Ms. Lalla holds a Bachelors of Arts in International Affairs from the George Washington University, where she concentrated in Security Policy and Asia.

“I have tried to integrate my background in international affairs with my passion for equitable opportunities, bringing tangible learning experiences to students. I am so honored to be a recipient of this brand new and important award,” said Ms. Lalla.

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About the District of Columbia Commission on Human Rights

The Commission on Human Rights is a quasi-independent body whose primary function is to adjudicate private sector discrimination complaints brought under the DC Human Rights Act. It is comprised of 15 volunteer Commissioners appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Three administrative law judges assist the Commission in upholding its responsibilities.

About the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights

The District of Columbia Office of Human Rights (OHR) was established to eradicate discrimination, increase equal opportunity and protect human rights for persons who live in or visit the District of Columbia. The agency enforces local and federal human rights laws, including the DC Human Rights Act, by providing a legal process to those who believe they have been discriminated against. OHR also proactively enforces human rights in the District through Director’s Inquiries, which allow it to identify and investigate practices and policies that may be discriminatory.



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