

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Contact:**

Nicole Miller  
[nicole@nma-la.com](mailto:nicole@nma-la.com)

**CIVIL RIGHTS ATTORNEY AND AUTISM ADVOCATE AREVA MARTIN  
RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION LEADERSHIP AWARD  
AND 200,000 GRANT TO SUPPORT AUTISM ADVOCACY**

**Los Angeles (February 13, 2017)** - Areva Martin, Esq. was presented with the 2017 *James Irvine Foundation Award* on Thursday, February 9 for her work with Special Needs Network, Inc., Los Angeles' premier autism advocacy and health organization.

The ceremony took place at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Sacramento, and included 350 elected officials, policymakers and foundation executives. In presenting the award, Sacramento Mayor, Darrell Steinberg, praised Martin's leadership in the passage of California's Senate Bill 946. This bill mandates that private health insurance companies cover autism therapies and was later extended to Medi-cal recipients.

Martin, whose own son has autism, learned first hand the difficulty of navigating systems of care. Recognizing that low-income families often lack the time, resources or networks to effectively advocate for their autistic children, Martin founded Special Needs Network to help Los Angeles families' access important resources and therapies for children with developmental disabilities. She launched Special Needs Network's Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities, a one-stop clinic providing autistic children with assessments, behavioral and speech therapies, legal services and case management. Martin also holds boot camps to help families learn how to access the resources available to them by law. Special Needs Network has served more than 40,000 families and, through advocacy, has created access to vital therapies for more 83,000 children.

"This year's Leadership Award recipients are exceptional for their ingenuity and persistence in advancing new solutions for some of the most difficult challenges facing California," said Don Howard, President and Chief Executive Officer of The James Irvine Foundation. "With the Leadership Awards we want to shine a light on their vital work and expand the impact of each of the award recipients to benefit even more Californians."

The Irvine Foundation has honored more than 75 Californians with a Leadership Award since the program began in 2006. Award recipients are chosen by an independent selection committee that reviews nominations based on several criteria, including the significance, effectiveness, and innovation of the leader's work.

The Foundation provides each recipient's organization with a grant of \$200,000 to support his or her work benefiting the people of California, and helps recipients share their approaches with policymakers and practitioners.

This year's other winners include Tony Brown of Heart of Los Angeles, Doniece Sandoval of Lava Mae, Julie Wilson of One Justice, Ken Berrick Seneca Family of Agencies, and Dora Westerlund of the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation.

This is the first and only time that the Irvine Foundation has presented a leadership award to a nonprofit leader whose work focuses on autism. "I am beyond elated to be one of the six leaders recognized by James Irvine this year. This award gives validation to the work that Special Needs Network and I have been doing for the past decade and the foundation's substantial monetary investments in underserved communities throughout California give me hope during these uncertain times," says Martin.

The award ceremony also included special presentations on the floor of the California state senate. California State Senator Holly Mitchell acknowledged Martin and the other honorees, all of whom were presented with Senate proclamations.

#### **About Special Needs Network, Inc.**

Special Needs Network's mission is to raise public awareness of developmental disabilities and to impact public policy, while providing education and resources to families, children and adults. SNN serves as a link between under-served communities and mainstream developmental disability organizations and governmental institutions, which often fail to address issues specific to these communities. SNN firmly believes that dignity, hope and opportunity are the birthright of all children. For more information on the organization visit [www.specialneedsnetwork.org](http://www.specialneedsnetwork.org) or call 323-291-7100.

#### **About The James Irvine Foundation**

The James Irvine Foundation is a private, nonprofit grant making foundation dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of California. The Foundation's grant making focuses on expanding economic and political opportunity for families and young adults who are working but struggling with poverty. Since 1937 the Foundation has provided more than \$1.6 billion in grants to more than 3,600 nonprofit organizations throughout California. With about \$2 billion in assets, the Foundation will make grants of \$90 million in 2017. For more, visit: <http://www.irvine.org>