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Paula Knudsen Burke of Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press honored with PNA Benjamin Franklin Award for Excellence

HARRISBURG, Pa. (Sept. 12, 2024) — The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is proud to present the 2024 Benjamin Franklin Award for Excellence to Paula Knudsen Burke, attorney with the nonprofit Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The Benjamin Franklin Award was established in 1998 to recognize outstanding service that reflects positively on the news media industry in Pennsylvania.

Throughout her career, Knudsen Burke has positioned herself as an advocate for First Amendment rights and government transparency. She has held the role of investigative reporter, editor, lobbyist, media law attorney, instructor and mentor. She has litigated successful cases across Pennsylvania pro bono, defending the public's access to government meetings and open records through Right-To-Know laws. Her colleagues applaud her efforts to maintain a strong, free, independent press.

Investigative reporters Angela Coulombis of Spotlight PA and Brad Bumsted, formerly of LNP Media Lancaster, submitted a joint nomination letter on Knudsen Burke's behalf. "No one in Pennsylvania has worked harder over the last decade to ensure access to public records and demand transparency from state and local governments than Paula Knudsen Burke," they said. "Paula has tenaciously challenged government secrecy to ensure journalists – and ultimately, the public – have access to critical information about how taxpayer dollars are spent."

PNA President & CEO William Cotter shared his thoughts on Knudsen Burke's achievement. "Paula Knudsen Burke is so deserving of this year's Ben Franklin award as she continues to make an incredible mark on Pennsylvania media law," he said. "As an attorney with the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, she continues to fight legal battles on behalf of the media and has lobbied successfully for open records and public access."

PNA Media Law Counsel Melissa Bevan Melewsy acknowledges the impact Knudsen Burke's work has had on journalism in the commonwealth. "Paula's successes have changed the tide of media law in Pennsylvania. Her service to media in Pennsylvania has been instrumental in changing the face of the law in favor of public access and accountability, creating a better legal environment for news gathering and reporting, and a better Pennsylvania for those who call it home."

Knudsen Burke also dedicates her time to training journalists, government officials and the public on media law issues and the critical role the press has in democracy. Assistant Managing Editor Mike Wereschagin of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette noted her dedication in his nomination letter. "She routinely hosts free public records seminars for newsrooms across Pennsylvania and is an ever-present resource for journalists in their search for the truth about the governments they cover." He continued, "Paula has the mind of a lawyer, the heart of a journalist, the soul of a public servant."

The award will be presented at PNA's 100th Anniversary Gala & Annual Dinner on Thursday, Nov. 14 at the Hershey Country Club.

About PNA:

Founded in 1925, PNA is the nonprofit trade association for print and online news media in Pennsylvania. Its mission is to advance the business interests of Pennsylvania news media organizations and to promote the importance of a free and independent press.