

## **Maryland Women's Hall of Fame Nomination Narrative**

### **Susan K. Goering**

**Include a brief biographical sketch including information on the nominee's education, employment and volunteer activities.**

Susan K. Goering was born in 1952 in Newtown, Kansas. Her family are Mennonite, a small branch of Lutherans who split off in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century after Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation. Susan's family is pacifist; they have long believed in working hard, living frugally, and working towards social justice – all traits that underpin who she is today and what she has done in a life that has already been remarkable. As a member of a religious minority that experienced persecution over hundreds of years, and which immigrated to America to find an opportunity to live life freely, she understands why it is important for there to be checks and balances to the will of the majority. Though Susan continues to have deep roots and a great love for the Midwest, many would agree that her most lasting contribution has been in the Free State, Maryland, where she has lived for 26 years.

Susan Goering attended the University of Kansas for college and law school. From 1982 to 1985, she worked on the last *Brown v. Board of Education*-style school segregation case, which was initiated by NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1986, Susan came to Maryland to become Legal Director for the ACLU of Maryland; In 1996, she became the organization's Executive Director. During that time she led the Maryland ACLU's advocacy in post-9/11 America, while overseeing a substantial expansion of the organization's staff, program and resources.

Susan Goering leads by example both at her job and in her personal life. For Susan, nothing should be wasted – she personally brings leftover food from large work-related events to Our Daily Bread and homeless shelters in Baltimore. She is an active member at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, where collects donations for church flea markets. In addition, she is an active gardener and impassioned environment steward, taking seriously her impact on the earth and reusing everything she can.

Susan was awarded the Robert M Bell Award for Leadership in Public Service in 2006, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service's Keeper of the Dream Award in 2000, and the Maryland Bar Foundation's Legal Excellence Award for the Advancement of Unpopular Causes in 1994.

**Identify the nominee's outstanding achievement, accomplishment or contribution for which she should be considered. A listing of other accomplishments may be included.**

Susan Goering has been the mastermind behind some of Maryland's biggest civil rights cases of the last several decades. She is a strong advocate for strategies to end

“institutional racism” and “structural segregation.” These advances include the lawsuit *Bradford v. Board of Education* on behalf of all public school children in Baltimore, which argued that Maryland’s most vulnerable students were not receiving the “thorough and efficient” education guaranteed them by the state Constitution. That right is undergirded by the need for adequate funding for public education. The success in the *Bradford* court case propelled the passage of the historic Bridge to Excellence in Education Act (“Thornton” formula), which increased funds for education based on principles of “adequacy.” Funding increased in every school system in the state, with a particular focus of additional funds for at-risk children. That case also laid the foundation for the ACLU of Maryland’s Education Reform Project, whose 2010 report, “Buildings for Academic Excellence,” was the first to introduce to Baltimore the kind of successful, innovative financing plans that were used in other jurisdictions around the country and that ultimately were adopted in the recent \$1 billion school facilities plan in Baltimore.

Susan Goering’s unique ability to see the structural issues behind patterns of discrimination also spurred her to bring the landmark lawsuit *Thompson v. HUD*, which has helped thousands of African American families who lived in segregated public housing in Baltimore move to areas of opportunity around the region. In bringing the case, Goering sought to eradicate the legacy of nearly a century of government-sponsored racial segregation in the Baltimore region. The successful and nationally recognized Baltimore Housing Mobility Program is an outgrowth of the case. Through this voluntary program, families can choose to move to mixed-income neighborhoods throughout the Baltimore region, with better access to employment and educational opportunities. The difference in health and opportunity for children, especially, has been tremendous.

Although Baltimore City has been a special focus of advocacy for Susan Goering, her work has impacted Marylanders in every corner of our state. Under Goering’s leadership over the last 25 years, the ACLU has made a deep and far-reaching impact by representing thousands of Marylanders from very different backgrounds – nearly all of whom have been minorities in their own way and who otherwise were unlikely to be able to access justice.

Some of these Marylanders include pregnant women discriminated against in employment, girls held in dangerous detention facilities, female Muslim corrections officers who wear hijabs, women inmates shackled during labor, men wishing to care for their families under the Family Medical Leave Act, groups wishing to march on public streets, groups and individuals wishing to demonstrate in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, Black Department of Natural Resources police officers, African American voters on the Eastern Shore, disabled inmates in Maryland’s prisons, inmates at Baltimore City Detention Center, road crew workers segregated by race at Talbot County streets department, death row inmates, crab-pickers and other migrant workers, blind voters, disabled people using government buildings, people who hang out in their neighborhoods (no loitering!), people who ask for money (no panhandling!), people who get up early, or stay up late (no curfews!), citizens trying to access public records, GLBTQ people discriminated against in employment, housing and public accommodations, GLBTQ people prohibited from marrying, Maryland voters improperly barred from voting

through intentional or unintentional voter suppression efforts, public school students punished for exercising their First Amendment right to free speech, public school students punished for practicing their religion, public school students banned from accessing books and websites, high school drama club censored by school uncomfortable with “coming out” scene, inmates at antiquated Eastern Shore jails, pregnant women charged with reckless endangerment for behavior while pregnant, street performers on Ocean City’s Boardwalk, homeowners who post yard signs, residents of Baltimore City arrested for ‘quality of life’ crimes, black and brown motorists racially profiled on I-95, Annapolis public housing residents and their visitors, public school students subjected to illegal searches, blind bus riders, peaceful activists spied on and followed by the Maryland State Police, police officers with dread locks and braids, fortune tellers, Orthodox Jewish firemen, cell phone users tracked by law enforcement, motorists tracked by license plate readers, victims of police misconduct, Muslim families wishing to adopt kids into a pork-free home, citizens photographing and videotaping police abuse, employees forced to reveal their Facebook password to their employer, young immigrant DREAMers, citizens of Anne Arundel County targeted by corrupt government officials and police for personal and political activities, immigrants at risk of local police enforcing federal immigration laws, and students punished for sitting quietly during the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Explain the benefit of her contribution to society./Indicate her field or discipline (art, athletics, business, science, government, humanities, education, etc.)**

Susan Goering is a visionary civil rights leader, unafraid of challenges, eager to draw connections between the struggle for rights of seemingly disparate groups, and dedicated to working in coalition and partnership with allies of any political stripe to advance civil liberties and civil rights.

**Explain the enduring value of her contribution to society or to the advancement and independence of women.**

The enduring value of Susan Goering’s contribution to society is the little ways, person by person, she has made a difference. It is the ripple effect. Every person that she helps -- through better schools, better housing, less time in prison, free speech rights – lives a better life. They then pass it on. For a family she helped move to an area of opportunity, this means that their kids have a better education, better health and a better shot at life. They then grow up and pass on that better shot to their children. The neighbors and neighborhoods to which that person moved are enriched. And when formerly incarcerated persons regain their right to vote, they feel more connected to and responsible for their community. And when a person who was illegally stopped by police, feeling the humiliation and degradation of racial profiling gets help to stand up to and speak out against the injustice it ultimately can help create better relationships between communities of color and law enforcement. This work strengthens families, communities and, ultimately, our democracy.

This ripple effect has touched the lives of countless Marylanders. And because of the thoroughly humane way that Susan Goering – and by relation her staff, fellow activists, and friends – goes about making this far-reaching impact, she also fosters civility, respect for difference, listening hearts, and strengthened shared purpose amongst advocates for justice, equality, and opportunity in Maryland.

**Include no more than three letters of recommendation. Nomination packets may include supporting documents such as pertinent newspaper and magazine articles, primary works. Please only include essential documents that communicate the nominee's accomplishments as concisely and directly as possible.**

See attachments: Recommendations from Sally T. Grant, Gerald Stansbury, Laura W. Murphy, as well as an opinion editorial by Susan Goering.