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MICHAEL B. TRISTER 1941-2018

Over the course of a half-century career, Mike Trister worked tirelessly to defend civil rights, build a robust and effective progressive movement, and mentor younger lawyers. Mike was widely respected throughout the nonprofit world as a lawyer, advocate and teacher. He devoted his law practice to counseling hundreds of organizations that have sought, as he did, to make the world more just and humane, and we thank him for bringing us together to continue this work. As colleagues we will particularly miss Mike's collegiality, his effortlessly insightful legal analysis and superb writing, and the care he showed as he guided us to be better lawyers. And more personally, we will miss his incisive wit and his dear friendship.

Mike was born in Montreal to Canadian parents temporarily living in Princeton, New Jersey, where his father was in a post-doctoral program. When the family decided to remain in the U.S., Mike became a citizen here and spent most of his childhood in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He returned to Princeton for college and then graduated from Yale Law School.

A new progressive dean at the University of Mississippi Law School then recruited Mike to teach and develop a legal services program designed to serve the poor and provide clinical training for law students. The aggressive legal work Mike and a colleague conducted, including filing a school desegregation suit, prompted resistance from the state's political hierarchy. Bowing to pressure, in 1968 the University terminated its relationship with the program and refused to allow Mike and his colleague to teach at the law school if they continued with the program. The ostensible reason for the refusal was that faculty members could not have outside employment, but in fact other faculty members held more conventional positions outside the law school. Mike and his colleague sued Ole Miss and won. As the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit concluded: "It appears clear that the only reason for making a decision adverse to appellants was that they wished to continue to represent clients who tended to be unpopular. This is a distinction that cannot be constitutionally upheld." *Trister v. University of Mississippi*, 420 F. 2d 499 (5th Cir. 1969).

By this time Mike was working full-time as the first Executive Director of North Mississippi Rural Legal Services. He transformed poverty law practice in Mississippi, focusing particularly on advancing the civil and economic rights of African Americans in the state. Quite literally a lawyer's lawyer, Mike not only oversaw school desegregation cases, but also successfully defended NMRLS lawyers when local sheriffs tried to jail them. They viewed Mike as their "guardian angel."

Mike moved to Washington, DC in 1970 to join an organization started by a Mississippi colleague and civil rights lawyer, Marian Wright Edelman. In 1973 this organization became the Children's Defense Fund, which Mike later served as Vice President and General Counsel until starting his own law firm in 1976 (and he continued to represent CDF until his medical leave last December).

In 1988, Mike co-founded the firm now named Trister, Ross, Schadler & Gold, PLLC. Over 30 years, Mike counseled progressive advocacy, labor, charitable and political organizations as well as grant-making foundations on tax, campaign finance, lobbying and general nonprofit corporate matters – and, many, many of these clients “tended to be unpopular” in some quarters. Working with broad-reaching clients like the Alliance for Justice and the AFL-CIO, Mike created vital guidances about lobbying and election law that circulated widely among both lawyers and activists. Mike taught strategies to maximize advocacy, and he defended clients in audits and lawsuits. Central to Mike's vision of the practice of law was the importance of serving and supporting social, economic and political movements. Countless grassroots organizers and progressive leaders across the country have Mike to thank for their knowledge of the laws they navigate in order to press for social and political change.

Throughout his life, Mike also sought to improve the legal profession, through his example, his teaching at the University of Mississippi, American University Washington College of Law, and the University of Maryland School of Law, and his service as Chair of the DC Bar Legal Ethics Committee and the DC Bar Rules of Professional Conduct Review Committee.

This past June the Alliance for Justice honored Mike with its Lifetime Achievement Award for his “courageous dedication to social justice advocacy.” Mike's remarks and the testimonies of friends and colleagues at this event may be viewed [here](#).

We will remember Mike as not only a great lawyer but also as a passionate international soccer fan, a hiker of New York's Adirondack Mountains, an avid birder, and as half of a committed couple with his wife Duffy Campbell, Co-President Emerita of the National Women's Law Center, who together have done so much to advance civil rights and progressive causes. In addition to Duffy, Mike leaves son Noah Trister and daughter Karen Trister Grace, her husband Peter Grace, and grandchildren Jeremy and Mara Grace. He will be profoundly missed.

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