



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Charleston County Bar Association presents civil rights attorney Armand Derfner with the prestigious James Louis Petigru Award**

CHARLESTON, SC – Armand Derfner has committed his legal career to defending civil rights and recognizing equal justice under the law. Last evening, the Charleston County Bar Association acknowledged him with the prestigious James Louis Petigru medal. The award is the highest honor bestowed by the Charleston County Bar Association.

Born in 1938, Armand Derfner and his Jewish parents fled Nazi Germany to America on his second birthday. In 1960, he graduated from Princeton University and attended Yale Law School. After practicing law in the District of Columbia, Derfner moved to Jim Crow Mississippi to practice as a civil rights lawyer. His passion for social and political justice led to him being stalked, his dog being poisoned, and he and his wife being shot at multiple times.

Some of his career highlights include:

- acting as a civil rights attorney for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
- representing voters in Greenwood, Mississippi on the first day that the Voting Rights Act became effective in August 1965
- arguing before the United States Supreme Court five times, winning every case
- contributing to the passage of the Civil Rights Attorneys Fees Awards Act in 1976 and the Equal Access to Justice Act of 1980
- playing a major role in liberating the Charleston Five, a protest group that was falsely accused of inciting violence at the Charleston port in January 2000
- working closely with Senator Edward Kennedy on civil rights issues
- teaching at American University

Derfner is the recipient of many awards. In 2002, he was presented the Trial Lawyer of the Year Award by the Trial Lawyers for Public Justice. In 2009, the American Bar Association named Derfner's firm, Derfner & Altman, Public Interest Lawyers of the Year. He is an honorary lifetime trustee on the Board of Trustees for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Derfner was the recipient of the 2019 Commitment to Justice Award from the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation. He is also the co-author of the book "Justice Deferred: Race and the Supreme Court."

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“Some lawyers stand up occasionally while others spend their entire professional life ‘standing up,’ often and routinely, as a matter of nature and resolve, for what they know is right and just. Armand Derfner has spent his lifetime trying to transform this nation’s promise of justice into a reality for all, and we are honored to be able to bestow this medal recognizing him,” said Francis X. McCann, a member of the Petigru Award Committee.

The Petigru Award is not an annual honor; it is only given at the discretion of a standing committee of the organization to formally recognize an individual who has exemplified the highest principles of the legal profession. Armand Derfner is the fifth person to receive the James Louis Petigru award. The other four recipients are: Ruth Cupp, the first female member of the Charleston County Bar Association; the Honorable Richard Fields, former circuit court judge; Coming Ball Gibbs, a prominent criminal defense attorney; and Morris D. Rosen, founder of Rosen, Rosen & Hagood Law Firm.

About the Charleston County Bar Association

The Charleston County Bar Association is a nonprofit organization committed to promoting ethics and education within Charleston County's legal community as well as assisting the public through outreach programs and service projects. It consists of more than 2,200 members.

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