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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 16, 2013

Topeka--The Kansas Human Rights Commission (KHRC) is pleased to announce the recipients of the *James E. Butler Civil Rights Award* in commemoration of the KHRC's 60th anniversary. The recipients are:

- Onofre "Opie" Astorga, Dodge City,
- Will Burnett, formerly of Salina, currently of Topeka,
- Deborah L. Dandridge, Topeka,
- Martha K. Gabehart, Auburn,
- Senator George Haley, Kansas City,
- Senator Curtis McClinton (posthumous), Wichita,
- Robert W. Mikesic, Lawrence,
- Brandon L. Myers, Auburn,
- Darrell Pope, Hutchinson, and
- Representative Myles Stevens (posthumous), Kansas City.

Susan Wagle, Wichita, receives a special recognition as the first woman President of the Kansas Senate.

Kansas Human Rights Commission Chair Melvin Neufeld, Garden City, said, "As Chairman, I am pleased to announce the *James E. Butler Civil Rights Award* recipients who have worked hard in Kansas. I am particularly pleased with the recognition of Senate President Wagle who has been an example for Kansas women of working hard and overcoming obstacles to achieve greatness".

Executive Director William V. Minner said, "Kansas was the twelfth state in the nation to establish an anti-discrimination law, which predates the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act. Kansas has been a leader in civil rights, and this distinction is owed to the Kansas trailblazers in both the Executive and Legislative branches, and ordinary people. Their achievements still positively affect us today."



Onofre "Opie" Astorga was born and raised in New Mexico. He is the son of Jose Astorga and Cloetilde Padilla. He attended Moriarty High School in New Mexico where he was nicknamed "Opie". Astorga graduated from Moriarty High School in 1979. In June 1981, he married Monica Davis and moved to Liberal, Kansas, where he became employed at National Beef Packing Company. Astorga advanced from production worker to supervisor and then to Assistant Human Resource Manager. In 1993, he was promoted to Human Resource Manager at the National Beef facility in Dodge City, where he is still employed. Astorga has worked for National Beef Packing Company for 32 years and is currently the Senior Employee Relations Manager. Astorga has served on several commissions and boards, including the Kansas Human Rights Commission from March 1996 – January 2001, the Western Plains Regional Hospital, Project Teen Safe, and Chamber of Commerce. He is the current President of Project Teen Safe. He is a member of The Patriot Guard of Kansas, the Dodge City

Shrine Club, and ABATE of Kansas District 7. Astorga resides in Dodge City, has two daughters and one grandchild.



Will Burnett has been active in the civil rights field since 1965. He began his career with the Unified School District 501, Topeka, by working to get minorities involved in school in ways other than sports. Burnett also served as the Assistant Director of the Topeka Human Relations Commission and was instrumental in assisting 14 other Kansas cities to create local human relations commission. He was also pivotal in developing the Kansas Human Relations Association (KHRA) and held various positions in the KHRA. He was hired by the City of Salina to be the second Director of the Salina Human Relations Commission. During his 24-year tenure with the Salina

Human Relations Commission, Burnett received several awards from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for outstanding processing of complaints. Burnett also chaired region 7 of the Regional Executive Council on Civil Rights. Burnett served as a regional chair and on the Board of the International Association of Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA). He also served on the Board of the National Association of Human Rights Workers (NAHRW) for three years. Burnett is a life-time member of the NAACP.



Deborah L. Dandridge has been employed at the Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries since March 1986. She works to acquire donations of written and photographic materials that document the African American experience in Kansas and the Great Plains, to oversee and expand the growth of African American collections in the regional history division, the Kansas Collection, and initiate and provide outreach activities to promote donations and use of the African American collections. She is the recipient of the *Gretchen and Gene A. Budig Distinguished Librarian Award, 2008*, meritorious professional performance by a KU library faculty member who has

demonstrated outstanding lifetime achievements. Dandridge previously taught African American history/studies at Washburn University, Topeka, and the University of Kansas, Lawrence. She has been a speaker, panelist, and author many times on the African American experience in Kansas, including on *Brown v. Board of Education*. Dandridge was appointed to the *Brown v. Board 50th Anniversary Commission* by former President George W. Bush. Her current and previous community service includes the Topeka Chapter of the NAACP, Brown Foundation, the Kansas African Affairs Commission, and the Kansas Humanities Council. Dandridge resides in Topeka.



Martha K. Gabehart is currently the Executive Director the Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns (KCDC). She has been its leader since 1991. Gabehart's major accomplishments include successfully leading advocacy to amend the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to align it with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Kansas accessibility standards with the ADA Accessibility Standards. She also partnered with other disability organizations, the Department of Education, and Kansas Rehabilitation Services to start the Kansas Youth Leadership Forum in 2001 and the Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy in 2004. Prior to becoming the KCDC's

Executive Director, Gabehart was the Employment and Training Liaison for the organization. Her work included performing accessibility surveys of buildings, presentations on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and a review of 504 implementation plans of local Job Training Partnership Act Boards. Gabehart is a native Kansan and lives in Auburn. She

graduated from Kansas State University and is a certified public manager. She has two children and four grandchildren.



Senator George Haley attended Morehouse College from 1946 to 1949 with fellow students Martin Luther King, Jr. and Lerone Bennett. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree, he enrolled at the University of Arkansas Law School where he and C.C. Mercer were the only blacks at the school. While at Arkansas, he endured horrific acts of racism, including having a bag of urine thrown in his face and daily verbal insults. At the end of first year, he scored the highest marks on his final examinations and was writing articles for the *Law Review* by the end of his second year. He graduated law school in 1952, and was the school's second African American graduate. He joined the Kansas law firm of Stevens Jackson, who are often referred to as the architects of the landmark civil rights case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. He was one of the first African Americans elected to the Kansas State Senate and served from 1964 – 1968. He introduced legislation regarding the municipal housing law, which became KSA 17-2339. In 1969, Haley was appointed Chief Counsel of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (Federal Transit Administration) by President Richard Nixon. He served from 1973-1976 as the Associate Director for Equal Employment Opportunity at the United State Information Agency (USIA). Later he became a partner in the law firm of Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell and Hippel of Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. He established his own law firm in 1981. In 1990, President George Bush appointed Haley as Chairman of the Postal Rate Commission. He was re-commissioned by President Bill Clinton and served a total of eight years. In 1998, Haley was named Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia in West Africa, serving until 2001. Haley is the executor of the estate of his brother, Pulitzer Prize novelist Alex Haley.



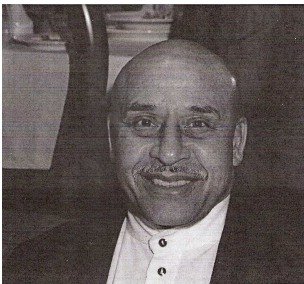
Senator Curtis McClinton (posthumous) was the first African American to be elected to the Kansas Senate and served two terms from 1960-1968. He previously was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1956. McClinton was one of a group of Kansas legislators to propose legislation outlawing segregation and discrimination in public accommodations and employment. These bills predate the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act. McClinton also introduced Senate Bill 284 in the 1968 session, which established the Kansas Education Council, the predecessor to the Kansas State Department of Education. McClinton was born in Braggs, Oklahoma on March 22, 1913. He received two Bachelor Degrees in Education and Business from Langston University in 1932. In 1943, he moved to Wichita to become a businessman and a licensed real estate broker, a career he continued to pursue until he was 98 years old. McClinton passed away on June 27, 2012.



Robert "Bob" W. Mikesic is the Deputy Director/Advocacy Coordinator at Independence, Inc, an independent living resource center in Lawrence, Kansas serving people in Douglas, Jefferson, and Franklin counties. He teaches self-advocacy to people with disabilities and works for implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Kansas Act Against Discrimination, Fair Housing Act and other equal opportunity laws and practices. Mikesic also provides housing services and assists families and businesses plan accessibility improvements. He has been involved in the disability rights/independent living movement since 1976. He served as a Commissioner for the Kansas Human Rights Commission for four years from 1992 - 1996 and six years with the Lawrence Human Relations Commission. Mikesic resides in Lawrence.



Brandon L. Myers was the longest-serving attorney and longest-serving Chief Legal Counsel for the Kansas Human Rights Commission, previously known as the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights. Myers began his employment with the Commission in 1979 and served in various capacities, including Staff Attorney, Senior Legal Counsel, Hearing Examiner, and Chief Legal Counsel. He retired in 2009. Myers represented the Commission on numerous cases setting precedents in Kansas civil rights law. He co-authored the Kansas Bar Association's Kansas Employment Law Handbook. Myers is a retired Master Sergeant, 190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard (Security Police/Law Enforcement Supervisor and Training NCO). He is a retired musician and past officer and President of the Topeka Local 36-665, American Federation of Musicians. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Kansas in 1972. He obtained his Juris Doctor degree from Washburn University School of Law in 1973. Myers resides in Auburn with his wife, Beth. He has three children and three grandchildren.



Darrell Pope became president of the Hutchinson chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1967 and continues to serve in that capacity to this day, over 45 years. In 2009, Pope was recognized at the NAACP's national convention as the longest continuously serving branch president in the United States. He has served in various capacities at the state and national levels for the NAACP. Pope was instrumental in organizing the City of Hutchinson's Human Relations Commission, and served as its Vice Chair 1971 – 1974. He was recognized in 1975 by the City of Hutchinson for his outstanding service as a Human Relations Commissioner. Pope has been recognized numerous times for his volunteerism, including receiving the Stover Award at the national level from Eaton Corporation, commendation from the national office of the NAACP for initiating a voter registration campaign, and recognition by the U.S. Department of Justice.



Representative Myles Stevens (posthumous) introduced an anti-discrimination bill in the 1953 Legislature, which established the Kansas Act Against Discrimination and the Kansas Anti-Discrimination Commission, now known as the Kansas Human Rights Commission. It passed the House and Senate, with amendments, and was signed by Governor Edward F. Arn on April 1, 1953. Kansas became the twelfth state in the nation to enact fair employment legislation.

Stevens graduated from Lane College in Tennessee in 1928. He continued his education by graduating from the University of Kansas with a law degree in 1933. In 1942, Stevens founded the Stevens and Jacksons law firm with Elmer Jackson in Kansas City, Kansas. Stevens was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1950. From 1954 – 1974, Stevens worked in a legal capacity with Kansas City businessmen to help establish real estate, banking, hotel, and auto sales activities. He also served as an assistant prosecutor and Judge Pro Tem of the Wyandotte County Juvenile Court. The Stevens law firm added George Haley (see above) as a partner in 1956. Stevens was appointed as Municipal Judge in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1974. He passed away in 1979.



In addition to the above awards, Senator Susan G. Wagle is receiving a special recognition as the first woman President of the Kansas Senate, following her election to that post in 2012. Wagle is a graduate of Wichita State University. She taught in Wichita Public Schools from 1979 – 1982, prior to becoming involved in real estate investment. Wagle was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1990 and the Kansas Senate in 2000. She served as the House Speaker Pro Tem from 1994-1998.

The *James E. Butler Civil Rights Award* was established in 2008 by the Kansas Human Rights Commission to recognize individuals whose outstanding support and service to the Commission has contributed to the cause of civil rights and enforcement of Kansas law prohibiting discrimination. The Kansas Act Against Discrimination and the KHRC's forerunner, the Kansas Anti-Discrimination Commission, were established in 1953.

Butler was first appointed to the Commission, then known as the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, in 1979 as a Commissioner-at-Large by Governor John Carlin. Butler owns the distinction of having served on the Commission under five different governors, having the longest tenure, 25 years, of any Commissioner in the agency's history, and serving until the age of 92. Butler is a role model who exemplifies outstanding support and service to the Commission.

The mission of the Kansas Human Rights Commission is to prevent and eliminate discrimination and assure equal opportunities in all employment relations, to eliminate and prevent discrimination, segregation or separation, and assure equal opportunities in all places of public accommodations and housing. The Kansas Human Rights Commission achieves its mission primarily through the receipt, investigation and resolution of discrimination complaints. During the last five fiscal years, the Commission has resolved in excess of 4,700 complaints of discrimination and recovered more than \$4 million on behalf of alleged victims of discrimination.

The awards will be presented at a reception hosted by the Commission on April 19th, 2-4 pm, in the Landon State Office Building.

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