

2018 NJJA Commitment to Excellence in Leadership Award

Senator Patty Pansing Brooks

State Senator District 28

Strong leadership is critical to effective change at the individual, organizational and systemic level for juvenile justice in Nebraska. This award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated exemplary integrity and leadership in serving youth and families and fought tirelessly to ensure that youth are treated fairly and effectively in our juvenile justice system. This year NJJA is recognizing Nebraska State Senator Patty Pansing Brooks.

Senator Pansing Brooks represents District 28 in Lincoln, Nebraska and has vowed to “take a stand and work hard for the issues that are important to all of us.” She walked into the Legislature four years ago committed to improving our juvenile justice system for every youth, so that our state’s children are treated fairly and appropriately as justice is served. She doesn’t see or speak of “juvenile offenders” or “criminal teenagers”; she sees young people who are our future and deserve everything we have to offer them. She co-chairs the National Council of State Legislators’ juvenile justice committee, which has articulated a set of updated principles for ensuring juvenile justice systems across the country are designed to serve youth in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Patty has been deeply involved in community issues since the 1980s, working with the YWCA, the United Way of Lancaster County and the Lincoln School System. She is also a small business owner, a partner in the law firm Brooks Pansing Brooks, a wife to Loel Brooks and the mother of their three children. Patty’s ability to inspire is reflected in everyone who has interacted with her, as she motivates so many to become more passionate about their volunteering, their work, and their families.

Patty was elected to the state legislature in 2014, and has worked diligently to advance legislation to youth a voice in their proceedings. She serves on the Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts, and co-chair Judge Douglas Johnson has noted, “She listens well, considers conflicting views, yet always keeps the best interests of the child at the center of any decision.” She has championed legislation setting a minimum age for charging children, worked to reduce the use of solitary confinement of children, and she continues to fight to that all children in Nebraska have equal access to counsel, truly understand their rights and do not enter unknowing waivers of counsel.

Senator Pansing Brooks has a high ethical standard and strong moral compass. She has achieved all she has through the force of her will, her enormous heart and her willingness to listen and collaborate.

On behalf of NJJA, congratulations Senator on receiving the 2018 Commitment to Excellence in Leadership Award.