

**2023 Thomas C. Hood Social Action Award Committee Report  
Presented to the Board of Directors of the Society for the Study of Social Problems**

Submitted by  
Lauren D. Olsen, Ph.D.  
Chair, 2022-2023 Thomas C. Hood Social Action Award Committee  
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology  
Temple University  
[lauren.olsen@temple.edu](mailto:lauren.olsen@temple.edu)  
May 23, 2023

**Thomas C. Hood Social Action Award: History and Description**

The Thomas C. Hood Social Action Award, established in 1991, is awarded to a local grassroots social justice organization in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (as defined by the U.S. Bureau of Census) in which the annual meeting is held that year. The 2023 award will be presented at the 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting, August 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

While the recipient can be an organization in the Philadelphia area that engages in direct service work, preferred recipients for the Social Action Award will be organizations that also work at the level of systems change. The organization may not be a local or regional chapter of a national or international organization and must be one that will benefit significantly from the award. The nomination of organizations that include directly impacted people and communities in leadership positions and decisions are also encouraged.

The award, which carries a stipend of \$5,000, is a fitting expression of the overall purpose of the *Society for the Study of Social Problems*, which is concerned with applying scientific methods and theories to the study of social problems. SSSP aims to bring together scholars, practitioners, and advocates to examine and understand social problems in order to further solutions and develop social policy based on knowledge.

**List of 2022-2023 Committee Members**

Lauren D. Olsen, Chair (2022-2023)  
Temple University  
[lauren.olsen@temple.edu](mailto:lauren.olsen@temple.edu)

Ken Sun (2022-2023)  
Villanova University  
[kcsun1015@gmail.com](mailto:kcsun1015@gmail.com)

Jan Doering, Chair-Elect (2022-2023)  
McGill University  
[jan.doering@mcgill.ca](mailto:jan.doering@mcgill.ca)

Marilyn S. Baffoe-Bonnie (2022-2023)  
Rutgers University  
[m.bbonnie@rutgers.edu](mailto:m.bbonnie@rutgers.edu)

Salvador Rangel (2022-2023)  
Swarthmore College  
[rangel1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:rangel1@swarthmore.edu)

Kathleen Asbury (2022-2023)  
Community College of Philadelphia  
[kasbury@ccp.edu](mailto:kasbury@ccp.edu)

## Selection Process Details

This year, the committee received ten nominations and Lauren, Jan, Salvador, Ken, and Marilyn met via Zoom to discuss them. At the beginning and close of the meeting we all remarked upon how good of a problem we had before us—that there were many deserving organizations for this award and that it would be tough to choose.

We began the meeting discussing the criteria and focused our deliberations around three central parts: 1) whether the organization nominated was local and grassroots, 2) whether the organization was working towards systems-level change, and 3) whether the organization had many sources of funding or a few to determine how much \$5,000 matter.

From our initial discussions, three organizations were eliminated from the pool for consideration based upon their national or international ties:

- 1) Training for Change
- 2) Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign
- 3) South Asian American Digital Archive

We then got to discussing our interpretations of systems-level change, wherein we noted that we were looking for organizations committed to changing policies, advocating for programming oriented around institutional changes, and/or creating an alternate system to the extant ones. After deliberating further, we decided to eliminate the following from the pool because their service focus was either on the individual-level or too under-specified in their submitted documentation:

- 4) The Art Alliance
- 5) Community Bail Fund
- 6) Kensington Voice

We also eliminated the following group because they disclosed in their nomination form that they received over \$500,000 in fundraising in the year prior, which is much more than what the other organizations seem to be working with:

- 7) Philadelphia Justice Project for Women and Girls

It is also important to note that with the above organization, Ken recused himself because he had a colleague who worked closely with the organization and he did not want to sway the deliberations in any particular way. Finally, we discussed the merits of the remaining top three choices, each of them fulfilling the criteria and, quite frankly, a bit difficult to compare! I will discuss each of these three at greater length since they were set to a vote:

- 8) *Youth Art and Self-Empowerment Program (YASP)* – An organization with almost 20 years history in Philadelphia, this small organization runs several programs and services oriented around providing young people who have encounters with the carceral system with both means for expressing and advocating for themselves *and* toward changing policies to end

youth incarceration (or abate its impacts). The carceral system is what they are aiming to change, which, as the organization notes, glaringly and inequitably impacts youth of color.

- 9) *Project SAFE* – An organization that is so grassroots that they have not incorporated into a non-profit, this organization serves queer and BIPOC people who use drugs or engage in sex work to provide them with harm-reducing support, whether with drug use, safe sex, housing, clothes, etc. One way to interpret this individual-level support, though, is that Project SAFE’s creates an alternate system for people traditionally and ubiquitously marginalized from formal healthcare institutions to access what they need for health and human services. The organization also engages in programming to change institutions that are a part of formal health and human services systems.
- 10) *Coalition for Restaurant Safety and Health* – This organization was created just before the pandemic operating at a nexus of important systems-level change, like combating wage-theft and labor exploitation, campaigning for better policies for sexual harassment and paid sick leave. This small organization has done grassroots campaigning with policymakers and in the community. They raised awareness around many issues during the early onset of the pandemic, fill a gap that many union-busting restaurant spaces will not allow unions to fill, and also are helping in the fight against gentrification in Chinatown.

We agreed that we would think about these three independently and then hold an anonymous vote. Lauren circulated an anonymous poll, whereupon the committee ultimately had two weeks to think through the top three and cast their vote for their top choice.

### **2023 Winner: The Coalition for Restaurant Safety and Health**

The *Coalition for Restaurant Safety and Health* received 3 of 5 votes, making it the top choice for the committee. In many respects, this reflects the conversation we had together, noting how this organization—outlined above—is working at the grassroots level to address so *many* of the social problems via systems-level change. That said, there were so many worthy organizations, that this was indeed a tough choice and we would like to acknowledge the excellent work that so many of these organizations are doing in Philadelphia.

### **Acknowledgments**

As chair, I thank the other members for serving on the committee during a busy time of the academic year, as well as Michele Koontz, Elroi Windsor, and the SSSP for providing the opportunity and making it quite easy to serve on the Thomas C. Hood Social Action Award Committee.