

Mary Meg McCarthy

Mary Meg McCarthy is the executive director of Heartland Alliance's National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), one of the nation's leading immigrant and human rights advocacy organizations. Under her leadership, NIJC has grown to a staff of 50 who serve 10,000 immigrants and their families each year through an unparalleled network of more than 1,500 pro bono attorneys. With its unique combination of direct service, impact litigation, and advocacy, NIJC promotes due process protections before the U.S. Supreme Court, Congress, and the executive branch. NIJC is a founding member of the Illinois Task Force on Unaccompanied Immigrant Children, the Freedom Network, and the Department of Homeland Security-Nongovernmental Organization Enforcement Working Group, which NIJC co-chairs. Recently, NIJC spearheaded an innovative immigration court help desk for immigrants in deportation proceedings. Ms. McCarthy has testified before congressional committees on human rights and immigration detention reform, speaks frequently at national and international conferences on human rights and immigration law, and is regularly quoted in leading news outlets such as The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Ms. McCarthy has met with members of the Mexican Congress, academics, and civil society to address migration issues facing the region. She has toured detention centers throughout the U.S. and gathered evidence of chilling civil rights abuses which permeate the U.S. government's immigration detention system. She is a commissioner for the American Bar Association Commission on Immigration and a member of the Midwest Coalition for Human Rights steering committee. Prior to joining NIJC in 1998, Ms. McCarthy practiced civil litigation and served as a pro bono attorney for NIJC's asylum project. Earlier in her career, she worked in Chile helping local communities safeguard the rights of individuals living under a dictatorship. She is a recipient of numerous awards, including the Chicago Inn of Court 2015 Don Hubert Public Service Award, Pax Christi 2013 Teacher of Peace Award, the Robert Bellarmine Award for distinguished alumni from Loyola University Chicago School of Law, the American Immigration Lawyers Association Chicago Chapter's Joseph Minsky Mentor Award, Lawyers Trust Fund's Esther Rothstein Award, and the Federal Bar Association's Sarah T. Hughes Civil Rights Award. She recently delivered the keynote address at the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies Trans-Border Institute's 18th Annual Sister Sally Furay Lecture on the politics of immigration reform and refugee protection.