

The 15th Annual Don Jennings Award for Social Justice and Political Activism is unanimously awarded to David Berns by the Manistee County Democratic Party.

The award will be presented at the Don Jennings Award Dinner to be held September 8 at the Manistee National Golf and Resort at 6:00 pm.



David Berns dedicated his career to fighting for social justice. He leads with kindness and compassion while bringing everyone to the table. He has served in both Democratic and Republican administrations concentrating not on increasing or decreasing spending in human services but rather on investing in better outcomes for children, adults and families. He learned long ago that we all benefit when we create communities that maximize the potential for all. David received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Public Human Services Association. He was specifically recognized for addressing the inequalities in the nation's child welfare systems resulting from poverty. Several studies have showcased his integration of financial assistance programs as primary prevention supports in child welfare. These efforts resulted in substantial reductions in the need for foster care and the safe reunification of children with their families in Michigan, Colorado and Arizona.

David has been designated as a Social Work Pioneer by the National Association of Social Workers. This is one of the highest honors bestowed in the profession of social work. This award noted his work as the state child welfare director in Michigan. Dave assisted the six graduate schools of social work in Michigan to improve their curriculum in child welfare and to provide opportunities for child welfare workers to obtain their MSW degrees without having to quit their jobs. This resulted in hundreds of DHS child welfare workers obtaining their MSW degrees.

Mr. Berns was selected as the Social Worker of the Year in Colorado for his leadership in welfare reform. Several studies noted his implementation of the TANF program in Colorado Springs as the most humane and successful welfare reform approach in the nation. The effort was based not on punitive mandates but rather on providing the supports necessary for all families to maximize their own self sufficiency.

David Berns moved to Manistee in 2014 when he retired from his position as Director of the Department of Human Services for the District of Columbia. He became the vice chair and then chair of the Manistee County Democratic party. He continues to work on issues of social justice. He is opposed to the ill conceived work requirements recently added to the Medicaid program. Dave is trying to guide the state toward a more humane implantation of the plan based on supporting people to be successful rather than punishing them when they are unable to obtain employment.

David and Colleen (Tabaczka) Berns have been married for over 50 years. They have two children, (Christine Garrett and Matthew Berns) and five wonderful grandchildren.

