

Pa. Legal Awards 2026: Attorney of the Year, Law Firm of the Year Announced

The 2026 Pennsylvania Legal Awards were held at The Hilton in Penn's Landing, Philadelphia, where dozens of lawyers were recognized for their outstanding work in a range of categories.

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By **Law.com Staff**



John Hare, with Marshall Dennehey, left, and Chip Becker, with Kline & Specter, right. Courtesy photos

It's no surprise that a stand-out experience for 2025 in the professional lives of John Hare of Marshall Dennehey and Chip Becker of Kline & Specter is in the courtroom.

As opposing counsel, the two faced off in a series of headline-grabbing civil appeals involving more than \$3.5 billion in verdicts and judgments, including cases that set records for the largest rulings ever upheld and overturned by Pennsylvania appellate courts.

While the moment they pointed to as a standout experience for their respective years involved them opposing each other in a case, it wasn't any of the historic cases they were involved in.

Instead, it involved groups of middle school students from St. Mary Interparochial School trying a case at Philadelphia City Hall before justices from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

The men described a joint program between the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Historical Commission, on which they both serve, and the Rendell Center for Civics and Civic Engagement that brings students into the courtroom. They helped prepare students to argue a 19th-century Pennsylvania Supreme Court case stemming from the Molly Maguires trials, which centered on organized labor in the state's coal regions. Seventh graders staged the trial, while eighth graders argued the appeal.

Becker said working with the students—guiding them through evidence, legal arguments, and courtroom roles—was his most rewarding courtroom experience of 2025.

"It was the loveliest thing, and in the category of 'John and I spent a lot of time in the courtroom,' this was about the sweetest and nicest, and most heartwarming way of being in a courtroom with these youngsters encountering this material about the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, about the history of our commonwealth, and also learning about legal process and what cases are, what evidence is, what judges do," Becker said.

The duo is nominated as Law.com's Pennsylvania Attorney of the Year for their work in and outside of the court. The past year was a historic one for them both, achieving billion-dollar results for clients and regularly tackling, achieving and appealing multi-million dollar verdicts.

"The volume of dollars involved was historic, billions of dollars, like I said, the three largest verdicts overturned and upheld," Hare said. "But also in these times that are so contentious, I think it's a good example of how lawyers can collaborate across the aisle in meaningful ways to find common ground."

Becker emphasized that the dollar amounts aren't the central focus in these cases, but rather, the various complex legal issues presented. He shared that one of the things that stands out for him regarding 2025, as well as before and after such a year, is "the sheer number of individualized legal issues that we have had to confront."

"You can look at the number and think, well, that's a big number, but that number is actually in some ways sort of covering, from the standpoint of appellate counsel, what the experience is. The experience is that there is an extraordinary number of decisions that you have to make, right? In terms of addressing legal issues, deciding how you're going to deal with them, just working your way through all of the dynamics of the facts and the law with respect to each one," Becker said.

Becker shared that 2025 involved moving rapidly from one major trial to the next without pause, a pace he attributed to the steady stream of high-stakes legal, factual, and strategic issues they handled.

Hare said that one particular challenge was "the confluence of a number of very significant cases going up on appeal at the same time, while also in the broader societal context, having very, very important issues around judicial independence and the rule of law occur simultaneously."

Respect and Rivalry

Despite frequently opposing each other in court, Becker and Hare stressed the importance of professionalism, civility, and trust. They described litigation as a blend of competition and coordination, requiring lawyers to understand when to collaborate and when to advocate. That balance, they said, helps keep disputes focused on legal issues rather than personal conflict.

"In litigation, the focus should be on the facts and the law applicable to individual cases. It should never be personal. The focus should never be on your opponent. Your opponent is simply doing his or her job to the best of their ability and good faith," Hare said.

Becker noted that in litigation, there is a time and place for things, including a time to collaborate across teams, and a time to battle issues out before the court. According to Becker, he and Hare have "a very clear idea of when we collaborate and when and how we contend," crediting this clarity as strengthening their relationship when they oppose each other.

"We've worked together closely in the court context, but also in the litigation context, and that breeds collaboration, which breeds trust," Becker said.

"There's a time to be adversarial and a time to be collegial, and based on a trust that is built up over 20-some years, we know when is the appropriate time for each," Hare said.

Advocacy and Alliance Beyond the Courtroom

Beyond the courtroom, Becker and Hare collaborated extensively on Supreme Court commissions and legal organizations. Their combined litigation success—totaling billions more in separate matters—along with their leadership roles and collegial approach, set them apart in 2025 as leading figures in Pennsylvania’s appellate bar.

In addition to high-stakes appellate litigation, 2025 was also a year both men focused on the urgency of defending judicial independence amid heightened political pressure. The pair serves on the Commission of Judicial Independence. Through the commission, they have been involved in presentations, pieces, and conversations regarding the importance of judicial independence and in support of judges.

Becker said the work came "at a moment when it felt very important to be speaking out about the importance of judicial independence and the way the judicial independence sustains the rule of law in our Constitutional system and ultimately our way of life."

"In 2025, we were across from each other over and over and over in high visibility, high dollar, high significance litigation, yet at the same time, working closely on these projects, hopefully for the benefit of our legal community," Becker said. "Talking about judicial independence is not new. It’s been important since the founding of the Republic and will be important forever. But the last year was an unusual year in terms of the volume and the intensity of pressure that was being put on our judges by folks in the highest levels of our political system."

Hare added that, while he had the largest civil verdict ever overturned by an appellate court and Becker had the two largest civil verdicts ever upheld by appellate courts, that advocacy is "really only half of what we do."

"While we advocate, we also collaborate, and we had a tremendous year working through court organizations and commissions to help support judicial independence and the rule of law and celebrate court history," Hare said. "I just think that it was a year that illustrates two sides of what lawyers do, advocacy and collaboration in really important ways."