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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **STAR<sup>®</sup> Announces Honorees for 2025 Champions of Change**

**BATON ROUGE, LA (September 24, 2025):** SEXUAL TRAUMA AWARENESS AND RESPONSE<sup>®</sup> (STAR<sup>®</sup>), a leading nonprofit dedicated to supporting survivors of sexual trauma, improving systems response, and creating social change to end sexual violence, proudly announces the honorees for its annual Champions of Change awards. These exceptional individuals have demonstrated unwavering commitment, compassion, and support for sexual assault and trafficking survivors, making a profound impact on their lives and fostering a culture of healing and empowerment. The Champions of Change awards aim to recognize and celebrate individuals who have gone above and beyond in their efforts to combat sexual assault, raise awareness, provide crucial resources, and promote a society free from the stigma and trauma associated with this pervasive issue. STAR is also excited to announce two journalists for exemplary reporting on sexual violence. We believe their work has played a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering conversations about this important issue.

This year's honorees represent a diverse group of individuals and organizations from various backgrounds, all united by their common goal of supporting sexual assault survivors and effecting positive change within our communities. Each honoree has exhibited exceptional dedication and creativity in their endeavors, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to empower survivors and advocate for justice.

**The 2025 Champions of Change honorees are:**

1. **Charmaine Caccioppi, New Orleans, LA**—Charmaine Caccioppi, Executive Vice President and COO of United Way of Southeast Louisiana, has been a driving force behind landmark policies improving safety and justice for survivors, women, and children. She pioneered creative funding solutions like using unclaimed slot machine receipts to process rape kits, helped pass groundbreaking domestic violence reforms, and secured millions for early childhood education. Through her vision,

coalition-building, and legislative leadership, Charmaine has reshaped systems in Louisiana to better protect and empower survivors.

2. **Richard Ducote, Covington, LA**—Richard Ducote is an attorney with over 45 years of experience, is one of the nation's leading child sexual abuse and domestic violence litigators and law reformers. He authored Louisiana's landmark *Post-Separation Family Violence Relief Act* and more than 30 other child protection laws, many of which became national models. From reforming Louisiana's foster care system to securing stronger custody protections against abusive parents, his lifelong advocacy has safeguarded thousands of children and survivors while transforming family law across the country.
3. **Julie Ford, New Orleans, LA**—Julie Ford is a survivor, researcher, and advocate who has transformed personal experience into systemic change. Her independent analysis of NOPD sex crimes data exposed issues with FBI under-reporting and investigations that spurred reforms, while her public testimony has validated survivors and raised awareness. As a PhD student who works with *Crime Survivors NOLA*, Julie bridges research and advocacy to strengthen survivor networks, push for trauma-informed policies, and hold systems accountable.
4. **Katie Fraiche, Alexandria, LA**—Katie Fraiche is a victim advocate with the Alexandria Police Department. She provides trauma-informed guidance through forensic exams, interviews, and the criminal justice process while also helping survivors access food, shelter, and transportation when resources are scarce. Katie's compassion and advocacy bridge critical gaps between survivors and law enforcement, ensuring survivors feel heard, protected, and empowered.
5. **Judy Ginsburgh, Alexandria, LA**—Judy Ginsburgh is the founder of *100+ Women Who Care About Central Louisiana*, the state's first giving circle of its kind. Since 2016, she has mobilized women to raise more than \$350,000 for local nonprofits. Judy's leadership has made philanthropy accessible, impactful, and transformative—strengthening services for survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse across CenLa.
6. **Representative Vanessa Caston LaFleur, Baton Rouge, LA**—Representative Vanessa Caston LaFleur is a fearless leader who co-sponsored Louisiana's Sexual Assault Survivor's Bill of Rights, authored laws protecting trafficking and child exploitation victims, and carried the *Audrey Wascome Act*, which changed the legal term “child pornography” to “child sexual abuse material.” Known for turning survivor voices into law, she advances justice, dignity, and systemic reform.

7. **Open Health Care Clinic, Baton Rouge, LA**—Open Health Care Clinic has partnered with STAR for over 15 years to ensure survivors of sexual violence receive free, timely access to HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and compassionate, trauma-informed care. By removing barriers of cost, language, and stigma, Open Health has supported hundreds of survivors while also advancing inclusive healthcare for LGBTQ+ and Hispanic communities. Their leadership in survivor-centered medical response has strengthened systems of care across Baton Rouge and beyond.
8. **Dr. Jordan Pedalino, New Orleans, LA**—Dr. Jordan Pedalino is the Sexual Assault Projects Specialist with the New Orleans Health Department and an adjunct professor at Loyola University New Orleans. She provides technical assistance and consulting to strengthen trauma-informed responses, and her research examines survivors' interactions with law enforcement and the role of specialized investigative units. Dr. Pedalino also founded Crescent City Courage, a citywide coalition that unites organizations through monthly sexual assault and domestic violence meetings to improve services, advance prevention, and drive systemic change.

**The 2025 Exemplary Journalists are:**

1. **Andrea Gallo, Baton Rouge, LA**—Andrea Gallo is an award-winning investigative journalist with *The Advocate* | *The Times-Picayune* whose reporting has exposed systemic failures in Louisiana's response to sexual violence. She has uncovered LSU's culture of silence around Title IX, investigated a student accused of serial sexual assault, and revealed how survivors were failed by universities, courts, and law enforcement. Through meticulous research, compassionate interviews, and unflinching honesty, her work has spurred university action, prompted accountability measures, and brought lasting public scrutiny to entrenched systems of power. Gallo is recognized for her ethical, trauma-informed journalism that amplifies survivor voices and reshapes how communities understand and respond to power-based violence.
2. **Ramon Antonio Vargas, New Orleans, LA**—Ramon Antonio Vargas is an award-winning investigative journalist whose reporting has transformed public understanding of clergy sexual abuse in Louisiana. Formerly with *The Advocate* and now with *The Guardian*, he has uncovered systemic cover-ups by the Catholic Church, chronicled the Archdiocese of New Orleans' bankruptcy, and provided in-depth coverage of the Louisiana Lookback Window Law. His fearless, trauma-informed reporting has amplified survivor voices, led to criminal indictments, and drawn international attention to abuse long hidden from view. Survivors, advocates, and colleagues regard Vargas as the journalist they trust to tell their stories with dignity, accuracy, and an unwavering pursuit of truth.

The honorees will be recognized at the Champions of Change Gala on Thursday, November 20, 2025, at the Balcony Ballroom in Metairie, Louisiana. The gala is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate these individuals and organizations who have dedicated themselves to creating positive change in the lives of survivors. The event will commence at 6:00 pm. [Sponsorship opportunities](#) are available. Tickets are available to purchase [online](#).

To learn more about STAR® and the Champions of Change Gala, please visit the link [here](#).

Interested parties and members of the press should direct inquiries to Morgan Lamandre at (225) 615-7093 or [morgan.lamandre@star.ngo](mailto:morgan.lamandre@star.ngo).

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STAR is a local, 501(c)(3) non-profit with a vision of building a healthy community free from oppression and sexual violence. STAR's mission is to support survivors of sexual trauma, improve systems response, and create social change to end sexual violence. STAR has offices in Alexandria, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. For more information, please visit [www.star.ngo](http://www.star.ngo).