For Immediate Release

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Attorney General Mark Herring and U.Va. Women's Center Program Director Claire Kaplan to Receive the 2015 Bernard D. Mayes Award for Excellence in Public Service to the LGBT Community.

Charlottesville, VA, September 9 — The Serpentine Society, the University of Virginia Alumni Association’s organization serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender alumni, has honored Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring and Claire Kaplan Ph.D., Program Director at the U.Va.’s Maxine Platzer Lynn Women’s Center, with the 2015 Bernard D. Mayes Award for excellence in public service to the LGBTQ community.

Mark and Claire are both being recognized by the Serpentine Society for inspiring leadership and unwavering commitment to the advancement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Herring and Kaplan will receive their award at the Serpentine Society’s 17th annual gala in Charlottesville on November 7th which benefits its student scholarship funds, grants to the LGBTQ Center on Grounds and philanthropic support for the Fund for LGBTQ Studies in the Women, Gender and Sexuality Program at the University.

Britton Davis, Board Co-Chair for the Serpentine Society said, “This year’s award to AG Herring and Ms. Kaplan is especially meaningful now that marriage equality is the law of the land and spousal benefits are offered to both faculty and staff. This is also the first year since the passing of the award’s namesake this past October. The professional achievements and everyday lives of this year’s Bernard D. Mayes Award recipients demonstrate that all families built on love and support strengthen our communities.”

Herring responded to this news with, “I have been honored to play a part in the fight for LGBT equality in Virginia and I am humbled to be recognized with this award, especially when so many others have sacrificed and fought to secure the rights of LGBT Virginians. When I announced that I was changing the state’s legal position and taking up the fight for marriage equality, I received so much encouragement and support from LGBT Virginians, their friends, families, and allies. Hearing the stories of those who were personally affected by Virginia’s discriminatory marriage ban gave me strength, even amidst fierce criticism. It has been a great year for LGBT equality, but we know that much work remains, and I look forward to all we will accomplish together.”

Kaplan acknowledged the Serpentine Society’s award by saying, “To say that I am moved to receive this award is an understatement. So many wonderful alumni have received the Mayes Award. To stand alongside them is a profound honor, as much as it is to receive a recognition named after a man whom I loved and respected. I have seen the University of Virginia evolve into a welcoming place for LGBTQI people during my years here, and Bernard played a huge role in that change.”

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Mark Herring became the 48th Attorney General of Virginia on January 11, 2014. He is working to keep Virginia families safe in their communities and neighborhoods, providing legal services to the Commonwealth's agencies, boards, commissions, colleges and universities, and fighting for justice, equality, and opportunity for all Virginians. Mark has lived most of his life in Loudoun County. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Virginia, he graduated with honors from the University of Richmond’s School of Law before returning to Loudoun and establishing a successful law practice in Leesburg. Mark got his start in public service as the town attorney for Lovettsville, and then was elected as a member of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. Prior to serving as Attorney General, he served eight years in the Senate of Virginia, representing parts of Loudoun and Fairfax Counties.

Claire Kaplan, Ph.D., is director of the Gender Violence and Social Change Program at the Maxine Platzer Lynn Women’s Center. A self-described “late bloomer,” Claire came out to herself and the world when she was 29 years old, following many years of progressive/feminist social justice activism. A California native, she moved to Spotsylvania, Virginia in 1989 with her now-wife, Lisa J. Berke and seven cats, to direct a national grassroots anti-rape organization. She then worked as a reporter for a small cable news station in Fredericksburg, until she was hired as the University's first full-time Sexual Assault Education Coordinator in 1991 (which evolved into the Gender Violence and Social Change Program at the Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center). Claire received her BS from the University of California at Davis, her Masters Degree at the University of Southern California, and her PhD in Education from U.Va. in 2004. Claire was deeply involved in the long-term struggle to achieve equity for same-sex couples at the University, meeting regularly with senior administrators to gain official recognition of our families, in order to get health benefits for partners and children, and family memberships to the APC. Claire was also involved with the committee that worked with the University to open the LGBTQ Center, served on the board of the Serpentine Society, and worked with student sexual assault peer education organizations to become more inclusive of LGBTQI people as well as all marginalized groups. These days Claire lives with her wife, Lisa J. Berke, and their daughter Sammy in Louisa County.

About the Serpentine Society
The Serpentine Society is an alumni interest group of the nonprofit University of Virginia Alumni Association. As an inclusive network and community of alumni, its purpose is to conduct educational and charitable activities in furtherance of the interests of the University of Virginia’s gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) alumni, students, faculty and staff. Founded in 1999, the Society reaches out to and advocates for all LGBTQ U.Va. alumni and students by connecting alumni with each other and to the University. The group's strategic priorities are to pursue equality, enrich LGBTQ student life, empower promising students, and invest in LGBTQ Studies. For more information, visit www.serpentinesociety.org

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