

Gina Chiala
2016 Rising Star Award Winner

Gina M. Chiala, an attorney in Kansas City, MO, founded the Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom in 2015. Devoted to protecting and expanding the rights of low-wage workers and consumers, the organization produces “know your rights” materials in the areas of consumer and employment law for low-wage workers, and provides legal services to low-wage workers in consumer and employment cases.

Gina was nominated for the Rising Star Award for her work as lead counsel in [Mejia v. Portfolio Recovery Associates](#), in which she represented consumer Guadalupe Mejia against a debt buyer for malicious prosecution and violation of the FDCPA. The result was a jury verdict of \$250,000 in actual damages, \$1,000 in statutory damages, and over \$82,000,000 in punitive damages; nominating attorney Bernard E. Brown calls the case “one of the most astonishing, impressive, consumer-supporting, precedent-setting jury verdicts I think most of us have ever heard about.”

Before founding the Heartland Center, Gina practiced at Slough Connealy Irwin & Madden, where she handled several consumer cases in debt collection, wrongful repossession, payday lending, and unfair and deceptive practices. She began her legal career as a Missouri State Public Defender, after graduating *cum laude* from the University of Missouri - Kansas City School of Law in 2006. She received recognition as a National Member of the Order of Barristers and awards in the areas of criminal law, civil rights, moot court, legal writing and constitutional law.