

THE BOND BUYER

California's Kathryn 'Kasey' O'Connor wins 2022 NAST award

By

[Keeley Webster](#)

Published

February 14, 2023, 11:10 a.m. EST

Kathryn "Kasey" O'Connor, executive director of the California Hope, Opportunity, Perseverance, and Empowerment (HOPE) for Children Trust Account Program, was awarded the 2022 Chris Allen Memorial Award for Outstanding Advocacy in Public Finance from the National Association of State Treasurers.

California Treasurer Fiona Ma nominated O' Connor for her advocacy of federal legislative issues while serving as Ma's legislative director from 2019 to 2022.

O'Connor was appointed to head the newly created HOPE program in December.

"For more than a decade, Kasey has been a critical member of my team," Ma said. "She's a leader in the office and a tireless advocate for some of the most important state and federal issues. Her work in California to establish the HOPE program and to extend the California Alternative Energy and Advanced Transportation Financing Authority are just two examples."



"When you believe in what you do and have someone like Treasurer Ma who supports and trusts you, it hardly feels like work," said Kathryn O'Connor. **California Treasurer's Office**

The HOPE program was established to seed trust funds for low-income children who lost a parent or primary caregiver to COVID-19 and for long-term foster youth. The California Alternative Energy and Advanced Transportation Financing Authority works with public and private partners to provide financing solutions for industries that help reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

O'Connor became executive director of HOPE program in 2022. The program aims to close the racial wealth gap and confront the issue of intergenerational poverty by creating a financial investment program specifically catered to vulnerable children throughout the state.

"I'm honored to be the recipient of this year's award," O'Connor said. "When you believe in what you do and have someone like Treasurer Ma who supports and trusts you, it hardly feels like work. I also want to express my appreciation to the NAST organization for providing opportunities to learn and grow, and for their support in helping state treasurers and their teams better serve their communities."

In addition to serving as Ma's legislative director in the treasurer's office, O'Connor also served in that same role when Ma was a member of the Board of Equalization. In that role, she led efforts on revenue and taxation issues,

particularly cannabis tax policy. She also held roles at the California Society of Certified Public Accountants and worked for several members of the California State Assembly.

O'Connor, Ma said, was also instrumental in helping move Congress to pass the ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Age Adjustment Act, which will raise the age threshold to 46 from 26 for tax-favored ABLE accounts beginning Jan. 1, 2026, the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 that is designed to substantially improve retirement savings options, and has worked on the SAFE Banking Act that would reduce barriers for financial institutions to legally service cannabis businesses.

The Chris Allen Memorial Award recognizes a state treasury, NAST member agency, or congressional staffer who demonstrated outstanding service in advocating for or advancing NAST priorities. It is awarded during the annual NAST legislative conference.