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Abolitionists Gather in San Antonio for Annual Conference

Murder Victim Family Member Jan Brown to receive Courage Award

(Austin, Texas) — More than 120 anti-death penalty advocates from across Texas will gather this Saturday, February 18, 2012 at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio for the annual conference of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). This event, "Seizing the Momentum – Creating the Climate for Change," will feature workshops and a panel discussion on the impact of Texas' changing demographics on the death penalty. Panelists include Michael Cline, the Associate Director of the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas at Rice University, Luis Figueroa, a staff attorney with MALDEF, and Andres Gonzalez, a long-time political consultant and senior partner with the Adelante Strategy Group. Jim Henson, the director of the Texas Politics Project, will moderate the discussion.

During the conference, TCADP will honor Jan Brown with the 2012 Courage Award for bearing witness to the impact of violent crime on families and providing an alternative vision of justice. Jan's 9 1/2 year-old daughter Kandy Kirtland was kidnapped and murdered in 1987. The offender was sentenced to death and executed 12 years later. Jan bravely shared her story with the Senate Criminal Justice Committee in 2011 in testifying against Senate Bill 377, which expanded the scope of the death penalty to those who murder children under 10 years of age. Jan's testimony, and her public stance on this bill, took many legislators by surprise and powerfully demonstrated that murder victim family members hold varying opinions on our society's response to violent crime.

TCADP will present a Media Award to Jordan Smith, a staff writer with the *Austin Chronicle*, for her consistent, in-depth, and fair treatment of the death penalty and other criminal justice issues. Long-time TCADP members Kelly Epstein of Houston and Brother Brian Halderman, the University Minister for Social Justice at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, will receive Appreciation Awards in recognition of their innumerable contributions to the organization and commitment to ending the death penalty in Texas. In addition, Bishop Joe Wilson, retired Bishop of the United Methodist Church, will receive the Dave Atwood Founder's Award for serving as a persistent voice for justice and mercy.

Anthony Graves, who was exonerated and released in October 2010 after spending 18 years in prison – including 12 years on death row – for a crime he did not commit, will serve as the Master of Ceremonies for the presentation of the awards. Graves and his family received the Courage Award in 2011.

"The theme of this year's conference reflects Texas' slow but steady movement away from the death penalty as the state's population experiences dramatic changes," said Kristin Houlé, the Executive Director of TCADP. "Even Bexar County, which accounts for the third-highest number of death sentences in Texas, has not imposed a new death sentence since 2009. It is time for elected officials in Texas to recognize the shifting climate on this issue and evaluate the impact of the death penalty on our counties and the state as a whole."

The 2012 TCADP Annual Conference will take place in the Sky Room of the Dr. Burton E Grossman International Conference Center at the University of the Incarnate Word, 847 E. Hildebrand, San Antonio, Texas, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The awards ceremony will take place from 12:00 to 2:00 PM. All are welcome.

For more information, visit <http://tcadp.org/what-we-do/annual-conference/>.

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