



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TCADP Annual Conference to Address Shifts in Death Penalty

(Austin, Texas) — More than 120 advocates and supporters from across Texas will gather this Saturday, February 21, 2015 at St. David's Episcopal Church in Austin for the 17th annual conference of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). This event, *Death Penalty Fault Lines: A Seismic Shift in Ground*, will feature workshops, a keynote address, and a panel discussion about current cracks in the death penalty system in Texas. Panelists include:

- Pat Monks of Houston, Texas, a criminal defense attorney and lifelong member of the Republican Party. He has served on the TCADP Board of Directors since 2010 and is an active member of Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty.
- Brian Stull, a senior staff attorney with the ACLU Capital Punishment Project in Durham, North Carolina. Among other clients, Brian represented Levon "Bo" Jones, an innocent man exonerated from North Carolina's death row in 2008; Adrian Estrada, a Texas man whose death sentence was reversed when the ACLU discovered he had been sentenced to death based on false testimony; Manuel Velez, an innocent Texas man recently released from prison; and Max Soffar, an innocent man dying of liver cancer on Texas's death row.

Tim Cole, who was elected to four terms as the 97th District Attorney (Archer, Clay and Montague Counties; 1993 to 2006) and served as assistant district attorney in the 271st District (Wise, Jack Counties; 2010 to 2014), will provide the keynote address. He will discuss his own shift on this issue as an elected official obligated to make life and death decisions and his belief that the time for the death penalty has passed.

During the conference, TCADP will honor Manuel Velez with the 2015 Courage Award. On October 8, 2014, Velez was released from prison in Huntsville after spending nine years in prison, including four years on death row, as an innocent man. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence of his innocence, the State refused to dismiss the murder charge against him unless he took a plea. Velez made the ultimate sacrifice in order to ensure his freedom and be reunited with his family in Brownsville. His case is an important and timely example of the ongoing risks of maintaining the death penalty and why we must abolish it once and for all.

TCADP will present Appreciation Awards to Alexandra Noll of Austin and Reverend Cheryl Smith of Huntsville in honor of their many efforts to raise awareness of the death penalty. As Minister of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, Rev. Smith holds vigil outside the Walls Unit during every execution in Texas.

The 2015 Media Award will be presented to journalist and filmmaker, Alex Hannaford, for his insightful and thought-provoking articles about the death penalty and for creating "The Last 40 Miles," an animated short film that presents a man's final journey from death row in Livingston to the death chamber in Huntsville. The film screened at numerous film festivals last year, winning an award for Best Animated Short at the Maryland International Film Festival and Animated Feature at Louisville's International Film Festival.

"The theme of this year's conference reflects deepening cracks in the surface of the death penalty," said Kristin Houlé, the Executive Director of TCADP. "Declining death sentences, ongoing challenges related to lethal injection protocols, exonerations, and increasing conservative unease about the death penalty are just some of the fault lines contributing to the ultimate demise of this system."

On February 17, 2015, State Representative Jessica Farrar (D-Houston) filed House Bill 1527, which would repeal the death penalty in Texas and replace it with Life in Prison Without the Possibility of Parole. The House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee has considered similar legislation in past sessions.

The TCADP 2015 Annual Conference will take place at St. David's Episcopal Church, 301 E. 8th St., Austin, Texas 78701, from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM. The keynote address and awards ceremony will take place from 12:30 to 2:30 PM. All are welcome.

For more information about the conference, visit <http://tcadp.org/what-we-do/annual-conference/> or contact Kristin Houlé at the information listed above.

TCADP 2015 Annual Conference "Death Penalty Fault Lines" @TCADPdotORG
#tcadp15 <http://bit.ly/z9SKzR>

TCADP is a statewide, grassroots advocacy organization based in Austin.

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