



# Seizing the Momentum

Fall 2018

Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

## The Importance of District Attorney Elections

With the midterm elections less than two weeks away, and early voting already underway, voters across Texas are making critical decisions about the future of our state and local communities. And while many Texans are keeping up with the high-profile races for Governor and the U.S. Senate, many remain unaware of the dozens of district attorney (DA) races happening across the state, including important contests in Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Fort Bend Counties.

Not long ago, many district attorneys could count on the power of incumbency to remain in office for decades. However, earlier this year, half of the sitting district attorneys in Texas who faced primary challengers were defeated, setting the stage for a potential sea change in the way justice is administered at the county level.

District attorneys are vital to the justice system for many reasons. The DA has the power to investigate felony cases and present evidence to a grand jury, decide whether to pursue charges or decline to prosecute, make bail recommendations to judges, and negotiate plea bargains. District attorneys select jurors, conduct trials, litigate appeals, and make recommendations about sentencing, probation, and parole after a conviction. **As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson once wrote, “The prosecutor has more control over life, liberty, and reputation than any other person in America.”**

When it comes to the death penalty, district attorneys make the decision whether or not to seek a death sentence in capital murder cases. This is one of the costliest decisions a DA can make, regardless of the outcome of the trial. DAs also work with state district judges, who also are elected by voters, to schedule executions once defendants have exhausted their appeals. One of the best ways to reduce use of the death penalty is by electing district attorneys who acknowledge the flaws and failures of the criminal justice system and exercise their discretion to embrace alternatives to capital punishment.

As the 2018 election season draws to a close, with election day on November 6, we invite you to learn more about how your elected district attorney impacts your community by visiting our *Death Penalty at the County Level* page at [tcadp.org](http://tcadp.org). Look for opportunities to engage with the candidates through listening sessions, meet and greets, forums, and debates as they make their closing arguments to voters. Visit candidate websites to learn about the positions they hold on the death penalty and other criminal justice issues. And, most importantly, if there's a contested DA race on your ballot, commit to vote for the candidate that best represents your values, and encourage your friends, neighbors, and family to do so too!

### Also in this issue:

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TCADP 2019 Annual Conference \* In Memoriam \*  
Donor Acknowledgment

### Scheduled Executions in 2018

November 14: Robert Moreno Ramos  
December 4: Joseph Garcia  
December 11: Alvin Braziel, Jr.



## North Texas Roundup

Greetings from North Texas! With the midterm elections fast approaching, September was a busy month for TCADP in Dallas and Tarrant Counties. We started the month by partnering with the First Tuesday Social Justice Film Festival in Oak Cliff to screen the documentary *Lindy Lou: Juror Number 2*. The film offers viewers a fascinating look at an often-forgotten population affected by the death penalty: jurors asked to decide between life and death.

After the screening, attendees engaged in a powerful discussion with Brad Lollar from the Dallas County Public Defender's Office, who helped explain how decisions to pursue death sentences are made and the behind-the-scenes deliberations that happen during jury selection.

TCADP thanks the PBS documentary series POV, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff, and the Dallas Peace & Justice Center for working with us to make this event possible.

I've also been grateful for the opportunity to speak at a number of forums on the death penalty offered by faith communities in North Texas. At First Unitarian Church of Dallas, I provided an update on recent developments in Dallas County and discussed ways faith communities can make an impact. Later in October, I joined Rachana Chin of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops and Marilyn Grant, mother of death row inmate Paul Storey, for a discussion with Dallas' Catholic community about Pope Francis' recent change to the catechism, which declared the death penalty inadmissible in all cases. Thanks to the Catholic Pro-Life Committee of North Texas for sponsoring that event and inviting me to participate.

Finally, with election season in full swing, TCADP has been connecting with district attorney candidates across the Metroplex. In Dallas, we engaged the DA candidates at three forums, including one sponsored recently by the ACLU of Texas during which we asked the candidates for their views on the intersection of the death penalty and mental health. In Fort Worth, TCADP and First Congregational United Church of Christ hosted incumbent District Attorney and Republican candidate Sharen Wilson to discuss the administration of the death penalty in Tarrant County and the work of her office's Conviction Integrity Unit, among other topics. (We hosted Democratic candidate Albert Roberts at a similar forum in May.)

I remain encouraged by the work we're doing to reduce use of the death penalty in two of Texas' highest-use counties. As we continue to talk with key decision makers and collaborate with community partners, it's clear that the death penalty's days in Texas are numbered.

*- Jim Webner, TCADP North Texas Outreach Coordinator*

**"As the death penalty decreases in popularity and use, district attorneys owe it to their constituents to consider the questions surrounding the death penalty before proceeding to seek a sentence that many believe has been administered unfairly in the past."**

- Former District Attorney Tim Cole, "It's wrong for an imperfect system to impose an irreversible punishment." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 15, 2018

Go to <https://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/article219950825.html> to post a comment in support of this powerful opinion piece.



## Texas Death Penalty Developments (As of October 24, 2018)

**Executions: 10** out of 18 nationwide

**Clemency granted: 1**

**Stays granted/dates withdrawn: 5**

**States that have carried out executions this year: 7** (Texas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, Ohio, and Tennessee)

**Individuals currently on death row in Texas: 224**

**New death sentences: 4** (Hardin, Harris, Tom Green, and Willacy Counties)

**Jury rejections: 2** (Atascosa and Bell Counties)

More information on specific cases is available at [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org).

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### *Seizing the Momentum*

*Seizing the Momentum* is published quarterly by TCADP and distributed to members and allies. All issues are available online.

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Starting in January 2019, TCADP will no longer publish *Seizing the Momentum* as a quarterly newsletter. Instead, we will provide members with a bi-annual impact report, which will include information on TCADP's priority initiatives and the allocation of organizational resources. Impact reports will be available online and in print for those who have asked to receive information from TCADP by mail. We will continue to send the monthly alerts by email to our full contact list.

If you have questions about this change in how we communicate with members, please contact Kristin at [Kristin@tcadp.org](mailto:Kristin@tcadp.org) or 512-552-5948. Thank you!



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on Facebook!**

View photos from our events, connect with 5,000+ supporters, and learn about important death penalty developments. "Like" us today!



## TCADP 2019 Annual Conference: Uniting for Justice

The TCADP 2019 Annual Conference planning committee is thrilled to announce that **Jason Baldwin** will keynote the awards luncheon at the conference, which will take place on **Saturday, February 16, 2019** at St. David's Episcopal Church in downtown Austin, Texas. Registration for the conference is now available; it includes breakfast and the awards luncheon, as well as access to all sessions. Tickets for just the keynote address and luncheon are available for those who cannot attend the full day. Complete the registration form on page 5 or go online to [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org).

### About Jason

Jason Baldwin was released from prison on August 19, 2011 after serving more than 18 years in Arkansas for crimes he did not commit. Known collectively as the **"West Memphis 3,"** Jason and his co-defendants, Jessie Misskelley, Jr. and Damien Echols, were wrongfully convicted for killing three 8-year old boys in West Memphis, Arkansas. Echols was sentenced to death. The factors surrounding their wrongful convictions led to a worldwide effort to free the three men and expose the injustices of the Arkansas legal system.



While in prison, Jason worked many jobs. One of his favorites was as law clerk in the Varner Supermax Law Library, where he served general population, administrative segregation and Safe Keeping (Death Row) inmates. Even when he was not assigned to the law library as a clerk, he spent most of his free time there. He also volunteered his time in the Jaycees and Inmate Panel, where he helped forge such programs as an inmate-funded scholarship program that benefited the families of inmates and guards. The program sought to erase the hard line drawn between inmates and staff and remind all of their humanity and collective responsibility to their community. In a world where most prisons are violent places, Jason worked tirelessly to foster a sense of community, self-worth, and belief that compassion is healthier than condemnation any day.

Jason is a co-founder of Proclaim Justice, a non-profit organization that seeks to win freedom for other victims of wrongful conviction, and currently serves as the organization's deputy director. He also is pursuing undergraduate studies leading to a degree in law.

### Accommodations

TCADP has secured a group rate of \$114/night at the **Fairfield Inn & Suites Austin-University Area** for conference participants. This rate applies to reservations for Friday, February 15 – Sunday, February 17, 2019. Reservations must be guaranteed with a major credit card and will require a one-night, pre-paid room and tax non-refundable deposit. Call the hotel directly at 512-302-5550 or toll-free at 1-888-236-2427 (be sure to tell the reservationist you are with TCADP to receive the group rate), or book online using the link provided on our website. Reservations must be made by **January 15, 2019**.

For more information about the conference— and to register online — go to <https://tcadp.org/what-we-do/annual-conference/>. Look for an announcement in December about our panelists, workshops, and annual award recipients!



TCADP mourns the death of **Dr. Elliott (Tom) Egan**, who passed away on September 12, 2018 at the age of 83. A lifelong activist for peace and justice, Tom was a faithful participant in many of our activities in Austin, including the delivery of our year-end report to every legislative office at the State Capitol and luncheon gatherings with local members. He was particularly passionate about the “Declaration of Life,” a personal request that the death penalty not be sought or imposed should one die as a result of a violent crime. He testified eloquently before the Texas House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee about this commitment and encouraged legislators to sign the declaration.

Tom also cherished rituals and often led people in thoughtfully-crafted observances at execution vigils and an annual “Cities for Life” event hosted by Pax Christi Austin and the Friends Meeting of Austin in November. We express our sincere condolences to his wife, Jeanie, and to his community of friends in Austin. *(Photo courtesy of Jeanie Egan.)*



We also were saddened to hear about the death of **Phillip Baker**, who passed away on September 13, 2018 at the age of 70. A practicing Buddhist, Phillip often stood witness in front of the State Capitol on the days of executions. His opposition to the death penalty came from direct experience with violence and the criminal justice system: his wife, Debra, was killed in Austin in 1988. Her case went unsolved for decades. Mark Norwood was convicted of her murder in 2016 and sentenced to life in prison. Three years earlier, Norwood was convicted of killing Christine Morton in 1986. Christine’s husband, Michael Morton, was wrongfully convicted of the crime and spent nearly 25 years in prison before DNA evidence exonerated him.

We remember Phillip for his grace and courage, particularly in light of everything he and his family endured, and express our sympathy to his family for their loss.

*(Photo courtesy of SEYDLER-HILL FUNERAL HOME INC.)*

## TCADP 2019 Annual Conference Registration Form

February 16, 2019

St. David’s Episcopal Church; Austin, Texas

\_\_\_\_\_ \$60 TCADP Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$80 Non-Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$40 Student

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Luncheon and Keynote only

\_\_\_\_\_ Enclosed is an additional contribution toward the conference.

*Rates will increase after February 1, 2019.*

### Mail payment and registration form to:

TCADP  
PO Box 82212  
Austin, TX 78708

Make checks payable to TCADP or go online to [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org) to register.

**Lunch preference:**  
Vegan  
Vegetarian  
No restrictions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Type: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Registration includes breakfast and lunch.**

*Questions? Contact the TCADP office at 512-552-5948 or [Kristin@tcadp.org](mailto:Kristin@tcadp.org).*



## Thank you for your generous support!

TCADP would like to thank the following organizations and individuals who contributed between August 1 and October 24, 2018. Your financial support is critical to the activities and events described in this newsletter. Please let us know if we inadvertently left you or anyone in your household off this list. We apologize in advance if we missed anyone.

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