

TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

TCADP 2022 ANNUAL CONFERENCE: TRANSFORMING JUSTICE IN TEXAS

A virtual event hosted on Zoom

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2022 | 9AM-2PM CT



Schedule

Times listed are Central Time (CST).

9:00 AM: TCADP 2022 Annual Conference Welcome

Executive Director's Report on the State of the Death Penalty in Texas

9:30 AM: Panel Discussion

"Transforming Justice Nationwide: Reflections from States That Recently Abolished the Death Penalty" featuring Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook, Barbara Keshen, and Denise Maes; moderated by Ellic Sahualla

10:30 AM: Keynote Address

Sister Helen Prejean

11:00 AM: Presentation of the TCADP 2022 Awards

11:45 AM: Break

12:30 PM: Workshop Sessions

Choose among the following four. All sessions will be recorded. See workshop descriptions and presenter bios on pages 11-13.

- *Transforming Justice Through Credible Messengers*
- *District Attorney Elections: Why They Are Important and How You Can Be Involved*
- *Faith Perspectives on the Death Penalty*
- *The Role of Mitigation Specialists in Capital Cases*

1:35 PM: Next Steps for Abolition

What comes next, featuring a special surprise guest and prizes

2:00 PM: Virtual Social Event

Join other attendees to discuss what you learned today, what inspired you, and anything else you want to share about your conference experience.

On Twitter? Tweet about the conference by mentioning @TCADPdotORG and using the hashtag #TCADP2022

Welcome from the Executive Director

Thank you for joining us for the TCADP 2022 Annual Conference – Transforming Justice in Texas. We are excited to bring you a virtual event packed with informative sessions, inspirational advocates, and expert speakers.



I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the 2022 Conference Committee, who have spent the last six months planning our signature annual event. I also am grateful to our funders and sponsors, everyone who registered at the Supporter Level, the TCADP Board of Directors, and TCADP Deputy Director, Hanna Seay, for their contributions to the conference.

Most of all, I am grateful to you for standing with us throughout the many challenges, hopes, and heartbreaks of the past two years. You have remained steadfast in your commitment to this cause by signing petitions and contacting your lawmakers, participating in virtual events and regional meetings, spreading the word on social media, and bearing witness at vigils on the days of executions. Together, we have shed light on the humanity of those condemned by an arbitrary and unfair system.

As we continue to confront the flaws and failures of the death penalty, we also seek to promote our own vision of justice—one that offers alternative responses to violence, lifts up the stories of the most vulnerable members of our society, and believes in second chances, even for those who have caused great harm.

I hope this gathering leaves you with a sense of solidarity and energized for the work ahead. We know this year’s elections will have a significant impact on our efforts to transform justice in Texas and I encourage you to use your vote as your voice.

Thank you for your tremendous support and commitment to this righteous cause!

Towards justice,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keturah Cunniff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TCADP Executive Director

President's Welcome

Once again, we meet virtually for our annual conference. Although I am delighted that we can be together for this informative and uplifting event, this format is a stark reminder of the challenges that we continue to endure as we emerge from the ravages of this pandemic.

The theme of our conference – Transforming Justice in Texas – reflects a sense of hope that change is occurring one life at a time. This year marks the 46th anniversary of the reinstatement of the death penalty in the United States. As we reflect on this significant milestone, we are mindful of substantial shifts away from the death penalty in Texas. For the past seven years, death sentences have fallen to single digits – a remarkable drop compared to 49 in 1999. At the same time, executions continue to plummet from 40 in 2000 to 3 in 2021. Still, even one execution affects all of us, undermines our human dignity, and will continue to erode our beliefs in our nation's fundamental principles of equity and fairness.

In the past few years, social unrest has laid bare the inequities and endemic disparities in our criminal justice system. TCADP remains firm in its unyielding purpose of reducing the use of the death penalty and its ultimate goal of abolishing it. To achieve this goal, we must continue to educate the public and elected officials about the harsh realities of this deeply flawed system. Communication, advocacy, and outreach are at the core of TCADP's work. We remain committed to enhancing our local, state, and national partnerships to ensure that we reach our goal.

We are delighted to host the inimitable Sister Helen Prejean as our keynote speaker this year. We are confident that her words will touch and inspire everyone. In addition, our panel discussion features representatives of states that have abolished the death penalty. Their experiences and insights will offer yet another glimmer of hope that the death penalty will be abolished in Texas. Finally, our breakout sessions offer something informational and inspiring for everyone.

As my term as board president comes to an end, I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside such committed board members. My deepest thanks to them. It has been a privilege and an honor to have served on this board for seven years. I leave knowing that TCADP will continue to forge new partnerships and strengthen its commitment to accomplish its singular goal.

Thank you to TCADP's Executive Director, Kristin Houlié Cuellar, for her indefatigable work in advancing this important cause.

And finally, thank you to each of you for your continued support through the years. While there is much to hope for, much work remains to be done, and we cannot get to the finish line without you!



TCADP Board President



Transforming Justice Nationwide: Panelists



REV. DR. LAKEISHA COOK

Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a minor concentration in Religious Studies and a Master's of Divinity. She also earned a Master's in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University, and a Doctorate of Ministry degree as a Gardner C. Taylor fellow at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. LaKeisha was licensed into the gospel ministry at the Antioch Baptist Church; has served as the Youth Minister at Mount Hope Baptist Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia; as Minister of Children, Youth and Young Adults at First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona; is the founding pastor of the Imani Community Church of Tempe, Arizona; and has served in various capacities for the campuses of Saint Paul's Baptist Church.

Dr. Cook has over 20 years of experience working in non-profits, education, and the African American church. As a pastor and preacher, she uses her platform to educate and empower people on social justice, racial inequities, and justice reform. She served as a program administrator for the Kyrene School District in Tempe, AZ, where she coordinated, implemented, and ensured the quality of intervention and prevention programs. She also served as the Criminal Justice Reform Organizer for the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and led a successful campaign that abolished the death penalty in Virginia. She is currently working as an Equity Transformation Specialist for Pacific Educational Group, Inc.



DENISE MAES

Denise Maes is the founding member of Maes Solutions LLC, where she helps clients navigate governmental affairs. Prior to founding Maes Solutions, Denise was the Public Policy Director for the ACLU of Colorado, serving in that role for ten years and eleven state legislative sessions. During her tenure, the ACLU championed numerous bills, including repealing the death penalty, advancing pretrial reform, enhancing law enforcement accountability, protecting free speech, and advancing juvenile justice.

Before joining the ACLU, Denise worked for then-Vice President Joe Biden as Director of Operations, where she oversaw the Vice President's budget, travel, and personnel. She also worked for President Barack Obama overseeing the Office of Administration at the White House. Denise has served on and chaired several community and public sector boards, including Mi Casa Resource Center, the Hispanic Chamber of Metro Denver, the Denver Water Board, and the Downtown Denver Partnership. She is a native of Taos, New Mexico and received her B.A. in Political Science and her law degree from the University of New Mexico.

Transforming Justice Nationwide: Panelists cont.



BARBARA KESHEN

Barbara Keshen is a retired attorney who worked for thirty years in the criminal justice system, first as a Homicide Prosecutor with the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office and then with the New Hampshire Public Defender's Office. Barbara has prosecuted or defended more than 100 homicide cases. She spent the last seven years of her career as the Legal Director for the ACLU-New Hampshire. Barbara served as the Chair of the New Hampshire Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty from 2008-2021.



ELLIC SAHUALLA MODERATOR

Ellic Sahualla is the chief of staff for Texas State Representative Joe Moody, a leading voice in the effort to abolish the death penalty in Texas. Ellic is also the executive director of the House Criminal Justice Reform Caucus and the former policy director of House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee.

Outside of his public work, Ellic is an attorney in private practice handling exclusively criminal defense and criminal appeals. Before that, he was a felony prosecutor and sat on the Texas District and County Attorneys Association's editorial board, where he wrote the first edition of their book *Family Violence Investigation and Prosecution*.

A Houston native and UT Austin Law alum, Ellic simply kept moving west until he arrived in El Paso, where he now lives with his wife, Dr. Gita Upreti, and their daughter, Eva.

Keynote Speaker



SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

Sister Helen Prejean is known around the world for her tireless work against the death penalty. She has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on capital punishment and in shaping the Catholic Church's vigorous opposition to all executions.

Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in the 1930s, Sister Helen grew up in the segregated Jim Crow South. At the age of 18 she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph. She worked as a high school teacher and religious education director in New Orleans before moving into the St. Thomas Housing Project in the early '80s.

In 1982, Sister Helen began corresponding with Patrick Sonnier, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of two teenagers. Two years later, when Patrick Sonnier was put to death in the electric

chair, Sister Helen was there to witness his execution. In the following months, she became spiritual advisor to another death row inmate, Robert Lee Willie, who was to meet the same fate as Sonnier.

After witnessing these executions, Sister Helen realized that this lethal ritual would remain unchallenged unless its secrecy was stripped away, and so she sat down and wrote a book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*. That book ignited a national debate on capital punishment and spawned an Academy Award winning movie, a play, and an opera.

Sister Helen's second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, was published in 2004; and her third book, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*, in August, 2019. She is currently collaborating on a graphic retelling of *Dead Man Walking*, to be published by Random House.

2022 Appreciation Awards

TCADP's Appreciation Awards are conferred upon individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to our efforts to stop executions and end the death penalty in Texas.



RICHARD ELLIS

Richard Ellis is an attorney with extensive experience in Texas death penalty cases. Capital habeas litigation – mostly in federal habeas post-conviction cases – has been his principal area of practice since 1996. He has represented over 20 death-sentenced Texas inmates in all four federal Texas district courts, in the Fifth Circuit, in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, in Texas state district courts, and in the U. S. Supreme Court. In the Fifth Circuit, he has argued 11 Texas capital cases and secured 4 reversals. He has also argued capital cases in the Ninth Circuit and the California Supreme Court. Richard has obtained about 11 stays of execution for Texas clients in various courts,

including the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. Currently he is one of about 15 attorneys approved by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals for appointment in capital post-conviction writs. He also currently represents death-sentenced clients in Nevada. We salute Richard's dedication to his clients and his zealous advocacy on their behalf, particularly in the latter stages of their appeals.

2022 Appreciation Awards cont.



MARV KNOX

Marv Knox is the founder of Fellowship Southwest, an ecumenical network that supports practical ministry and social justice advocacy across Arizona, New Mexico, Northern Mexico, Oklahoma, Southern California, and Texas. Fellowship Southwest expands racial, ethnic, and ecumenical relationships, and it builds partnerships to serve the most vulnerable people across the region. In this capacity, he has provided tremendous support for TCADP's work. Among his many contributions are endorsing sign-on letters and amicus briefs related to specific cases, authoring opinion pieces, and endorsing death penalty reforms at the Texas Legislature.

Before establishing Fellowship Southwest, Marv served as the editor of the *Baptist Standard*, Texas Baptists' news organization, for nearly two decades, and as a journalist for four decades. During his time at the *Baptist Standard*, he authored numerous editorials calling for abolition of the death penalty. Marv was born in Fort Worth and grew up in the Texas Panhandle. He is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, where he is a distinguished alumnus, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Marv has received the Lippard Award for Distinguished Service to Religious Journalism and the Solheim Award of Merit for Editorial Courage from Associated Church Press, the Lifetime Achievement Award from *Baptist News Global*, and a Katie Award from the Dallas Press Club. He is the current chair of the Board of Advocates for the Diana Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University. He and his spouse, Joanna, have two daughters, two sons-in-law, and five funny grandchildren. We thank Marv for his lifelong service to others and his compassionate advocacy for justice.

2022 Sherry Coombes Appreciation Award

The Sherry Coombes Appreciation Award is named after former TCADP Board Member and Treasurer, Sherry Coombes, who passed away in March 2021. She was instrumental in the professionalization and fiscal stewardship of our organization. Sherry also played a pivotal role in planning annual conferences, recruiting and cultivating new members, and organizing events in the Austin area, among countless other contributions.



Randi Chavez

Randi Chavez is the Director of Mitigation and Investigation for Texas Defender Service (TDS), a nonprofit law firm. She received a Master of Science in Social Work in 2003. While completing her graduate degree, Randi interned at TDS as a mitigation specialist. Upon graduation, she was hired as the first full-time mitigation specialist for the Gulf Region Advocacy Center (GRACE) and later worked independently as a mitigation specialist at both the trial and post-conviction levels. After honing her clinical skills for three years as a clinical social worker for an inpatient psychiatric hospital in Austin, Randi returned to TDS in 2009 as a mitigation specialist in the

Capital Trial Project. In 2017, she created and opened the mitigation unit at TDS. She now supervises a team of seven mitigation specialists who work on pre-trial and post-conviction cases across the State. With this award, we recognize her life-saving mitigation work, her commitment to her clients and their loved ones, and her mentorship of countless mitigation specialists in Texas.

2022 Media Awards

TCADP's Media Awards are presented to journalists, media outlets, filmmakers, authors, and artists who raise awareness of death penalty issues through their respective mediums.



Patrick Forbes

Patrick Forbes is the director of the documentary film, "The Phantom," a powerful new resource for educating elected officials and the public about the fallibility of the death penalty and why it must be abolished. Now streaming on Netflix, the film tells the tragic story of Carlos DeLuna, who was wrongfully executed by the State of Texas on December 7, 1989. Patrick has won the best director British Academy Award (Bafta) for his series "The Force," as well as best series Bafta for "The National Trust: (BBC)". His documentary feature about Julian Assange, "Wikileaks; Secrets & Lies", premiered at SXSW before being seen around the world. Patrick believes that documentary is an art form that is as vital, exciting, and uplifting as the best drama.

Maurice Chammah

Maurice Chammah is a journalist and staff writer at *The Marshall Project*. His reporting on the criminal justice system has been published by the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and other publications. He also co-organizes The Insider Prize, a contest for incarcerated writers sponsored by American Short Fiction. Maurice's first book, *Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty*, was published in 2021. A compelling and engaging narrative, it provides unique insights into the history of capital punishment in Texas and how this bears on the future use of the death penalty.



Workshops

1

Transforming Justice Through Credible Messengers

Presented by Julio Medina

In this workshop you will hear the story of an individual on Texas's death row with the desire to do good for his community, mentor youth, and prevent further violence. You will learn about Credible Messengers programs, in which incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals mentor youth in order to affect the outcomes of younger generations and seek to keep others from making their same mistakes. What would our communities look like if we sought restorative avenues of justice rather than discarding humans as worthless?



While serving a 12-year sentence, **Julio Medina** witnessed the profound pain of his peers and their intense desire to transform their lives. So in 1999, Julio founded Exodus Transitional Community. Under his leadership, Exodus has served over 10,000 participants and has become one of the most successful re-entry programs in the United States. Julio travels to prisons across the northeast to meet with the people he left behind, along with local policymakers to build coalitions around justice reform. Julio served on the Governor's Council on Community Re-entry and Reintegration in New York, which provides comprehensive, evidence-based solutions for obstacles facing formerly incarcerated individuals. Julio and Exodus were highlighted in the 2004 Presidential State of the Union Address, and Julio was awarded the White House Champions of Change Award in 2016. Julio holds a Bachelor's of Arts degree from the State University of New York at Albany, a Master of Divinity from New York Theological Seminary, and is presently a Doctoral candidate in Ministry.

2

District Attorney Elections: Why They Are Important and How You Can Be Involved

Presented by Laura Porter

District Attorney (DA) elections in 2022 will impact criminal justice practices and use of the death penalty in Texas for years to come as voters in Dallas, Tarrant, and Bexar counties, among others, choose their DAs. Join us to learn about the vast power of the District Attorney and how you can get involved in these elections now!



Laura Porter is the Executive Director of the 8th Amendment Project. She served as a Director of Campaigns for the Fair Punishment Project and nearly a decade as Director of Campaigns and Strategy with Equal Justice USA. Over the last 10 years Laura was a chief strategist in the death penalty repeal campaigns in Connecticut, Maryland, and Nebraska and gave strategic advise to policy advocates across the country. She specialized in building relationships with victims, law enforcement, and conservatives and led the groundbreaking national project Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty. Currently, she serves as the lead advisor to the Responsible Business Initiative engaging trade and business voices in criminal justice reform advocacy. Prior to campaign work, Laura was a public defender for 12 years in New York and a legal analyst on television.

Workshops cont.

3

Faith Perspectives on the Death Penalty

Presented by Pastor Lee Ann Bryce, Rex Lee Jim, Aftab Siddiqui, and Stephen K. Reeves

Faith leaders and communities of faith are integral partners in our efforts to end the death penalty in Texas. Their views on this issue are shaped by their beliefs about human dignity, restorative justice, retribution, and redemption. Please join us to hear from a diverse group of faith leaders who will offer a thought-provoking and reflective dialogue to illuminate the relationship between religion and the ultimate punishment.



Rev. Lee Ann Bryce is the Lead Pastor of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fort Worth. She is a native Texan who returned to serve First Congregational after living in New York, Colorado, Arizona, and Kansas. She is ordained in the United Church of Christ and active in justice advocacy for LGBTQ people, women's access to reproductive services and health care, criminal justice reform and abolishing the death penalty. Lee Ann is passionate about creating diverse, just, healthy, everybody-loving communities that model the peace and presence of Jesus.

Rex Lee Jim is of the Diné (Navajo) tribe and was born and raised in Rock Point, Arizona on the Navajo Nation Reservation. He is of the Red House People (Kin Łichí'nií) and born for the Red Streak Running into Water People (Táchii'nií). His Maternal grandfather is of the Towering House people (Kin Yaa'áanii) while his Paternal grandfather is of the Mexican people (Naakaii Dine'é). He is a former Vice president of the Navajo Nation, a poet, a playwright, and Medicine Man. He attended Rock Point Community School, the Newfound School in Asheville, North Carolina, and graduated from the Colorado Rocky Mountain School in Carbondale, Colorado. He attended Princeton University, Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English, and its Oxford University campus in England. As a leader, Rex Lee Jim advocates for indigenous peoples at the United Nations. His other works include *Áhí Ní' Nikisheegiizh* (1989), *Saad* (1995).



Aftab Siddiqui is the current President of North Texas Peace Advocates and former Chair of the Muslim Community Center for Human Services. Aftab volunteered with the United Way of Tarrant County where he was the Co-Chair of the Family Impact Council and sat on the Cabinet. Previously he was the President of Dallas Peace & Justice Center and served on the Board of TCADP. He is a former Vice Chair of American Muslim Alliance SW; founding member, past President, and current Board Member of the Muslim Democratic Caucus of Texas; the former President of South Asia Democracy Watch; and a founding Board Member of Pakistan American Association of Texas. Prior to migrating to the U.S., he helped establish an Amnesty International Chapter in Pakistan. Aftab has completed his BS (Elect), MBA, and MPA (UTA).



Stephen Reeves serves as the executive director of Fellowship Southwest and director of advocacy for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Reeves provides strategic guidance and direction for CBF's public advocacy efforts and works to educate, equip, and encourage advocates within the Fellowship. He previously served as Director of Public Policy and Legislative Counsel for the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission (CLC), where he directed the work of the Citizenship and Public Policy office in Austin and was a registered lobbyist. He is a native of Austin, Texas, a member of the State Bar of Texas, a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Texas Tech University School of Law. Before joining the CLC, he served as Staff Attorney for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) in Washington, D.C.



Workshops cont.

4

The Role of Mitigation Specialists in Capital Cases

Presented by Miranda Nolen and Caitlin Purcell

What constitutes “mitigating evidence” in death penalty cases? How do mitigation specialists go about their work to try to persuade jurors to sentence defendants to life instead of death? What mitigating evidence seems to be most compelling? In this session, you’ll hear from mitigation specialists on the front lines of capital cases.



Miranda Nolen is a Supervising Mitigation Specialist at Texas Defender Service (TDS) in Austin, Texas, where she has worked since 2017. Before joining TDS, Miranda worked as a Mitigation Fellow at the Office of Capital and Forensic Writs. She is a Licensed Master Social Worker and completed her graduate education in social work at the University of Texas at Austin. Additionally, Miranda holds a Juris Doctor from UC Hastings College of Law and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from UC Santa Barbara. Miranda’s work experience prior to joining the capital defense community includes representation for survivors of intimate partner violence, school administration, and treatment of adolescents in residential treatment.

Caitlin Purcell is a Supervising Mitigation Specialist at Texas Defender Service. She holds a B.A. from Yale University and received a Master of Science in Social Work from The University of Texas at Austin. While completing her graduate degree she interned at TDS as a mitigation specialist. Following graduation she was hired as the case manager for a new dual diagnosis inpatient and continuing care substance abuse program in Travis County. She later worked as a Clinical Caseworker at Downtown Austin Community Court before returning to TDS in 2018.



Thank you to all of this year's presenters for offering your time and expertise. We look forward to working with you further in our joint pursuit of justice in Texas!

Thank you.

TCADP expresses its sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to this year's conference.

We are particularly grateful to the Fund for Nonviolence, the Tides Foundation, and the Judith Filler Foundation for supporting our work to end the death penalty in Texas.

Thanks to Cicely Benoit for creating the "In Memoriam" slideshow.

We also thank our advertisers and speakers for their participation in this event and everyone who registered at the "Supporter" level. Finally, we express our gratitude to TCADP's donors, particularly our Sustaining Members and Partners for Justice, for their generous investment in our mission.

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Thank you.

Thank you to all the attendees who registered at the "Supporter" level:

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