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Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to hold annual statewide conference in Houston for the first time in 10 years

Organization to honor exonerees, filmmakers, local law professor and defense attorney, and individuals who played key roles in stopping the execution of Robert Roberson

(Austin, Texas) — Advocates from across Texas will gather in Houston for the first time in 10 years for the annual conference of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP) on Saturday, March 7, 2026. The conference, titled *Overcoming Legacies; Reimagining Justice*, will feature workshops, a panel discussion, and a keynote address from Professor Corinna Barrett Lain.

Corinna Barrett Lain is the S. D. Roberts & Sandra Moore Professor of Law at the University of Richmond School of Law and the author of *Secrets of the Killing State: The Untold Story of Lethal Injection*, which was published in April 2025. She is one of the nation's leading authorities on the death penalty and recently concluded a 23-state book tour to educate the public about her findings.

During the conference, attendees will hear from a panel of local criminal justice reform advocates who will address the legacy of injustice in Harris County, where juries have sentenced 300 people to death since 1974. Harris County cases alone account for 136 out of Texas's 597 executions since 1982, and 62 of the 168 individuals currently on death row were convicted in Harris County. Panelists also will share their visions for changing Harris County's criminal justice system.

One of the highlights of the day will be the awards luncheon, when TCADP will honor individuals who have raised awareness of death penalty issues in meaningful ways. The organization will present awards to two individuals who played key roles in stopping the execution of Robert Roberson, which was scheduled for October 16, 2025, but stayed by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. Roberson is an innocent father with Autism who has spent over 20 years on death row in Texas for a crime that never occurred; his conviction is based on the outdated and now debunked Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) hypothesis.

The TCADP 2026 Appreciation Award will be presented to **Jacque Benestante**, the Executive Director of the [Autism Society of Texas](#), who has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the ways Roberson's Autistic behaviors were used against him by medical personnel and law enforcement.

A TCADP Courage Award will be presented to **Josh Burns**, one of 41 people nationwide convicted under the now-discredited SBS hypothesis and [later exonerated](#). Josh also has been a fierce advocate for

Robert Roberson and bravely shared his own story to humanize the injustice Roberson and hundreds of other parents and caregivers have experienced at the hands of the state.

TCADP also will present a Courage Award to **Kerry Max Cook**, who was 22 years old when he was wrongly accused, convicted, and sentenced to death in Tyler, Texas. After two decades on death row with nearly four capital murder trials, three overturned convictions, and a U.S. Supreme Court stay of execution, the [Texas Court of Criminal Appeals](#) found him “Actually Innocent” on June 19, 2024.

The 2026 TCADP Founder’s Awards will be presented to two stalwarts in the Houston legal community:

- Defense attorney **Paul Nugent**, who represented two of the 18 men who have been exonerated from death row in Texas: Clarence Brandley and Kerry Max Cook.
- **Professor Ana M. Otero**, the Eugene Harrington Professor of Law at Thurgood Marshall School of Law, whose scholarship focuses on the death penalty.

In addition, TCADP will present Media Awards to two extraordinary documentary filmmakers:

- **Margaret Brown**, the director of the four-part docuseries [“The Yogurt Shop Murders”](#), which premiered on HBO in August 2025. The series examines the 1991 murder of four teenage girls at “I Can’t Believe It’s Yogurt” in Austin, Texas, and explores the wake of trauma left by the crime.
- **Smriti Mundhra**, the director of [“I Am Ready, Warden,”](#) which focuses on the final days of John Henry Ramirez before he was executed by the State of Texas on October 5, 2022. The film was nominated for an Academy Award in the Documentary Short Film category in 2025.

The TCADP 2026 Annual Conference will take place at the United Way Community Resource Center (50 Waugh Dr, Houston, Texas 77007) from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Saturday, March 7, 2026. The keynote address and awards ceremony will take place from 12:30 to 2:30 PM. Members of the media are invited to attend.

For detailed information about the panelists, keynote speaker, and award recipients, visit <http://tcadp.org/what-we-do/annual-conference/>.

The **Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty** is the only statewide grassroots advocacy organization dedicated solely to ending the death penalty in Texas. Led by staff in Austin and a statewide Board of Directors, TCADP has more than 27,000 supporters and 36 organizational affiliates. TCADP collaborates with local, state, and national partners to reduce use of the death penalty and advocate for change at the county and state level.

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