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Innocence Clinic Director Allison Clayton Earns Prestigious Arthur von Briesen Award

The National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) honored Allison Clayton, Deputy Director of the Innocence Project of Texas (IPTX), with the prestigious Arthur von Briesen Award for her extraordinary contributions in support of civil legal aid. The award will be presented during the NLADA Annual Conference on Friday, Nov. 2, in Houston.

The Arthur von Briesen Award honors an attorney who has made substantial volunteer contributions in support of the delivery of civil legal aid and/or indigent defense representation. Started in 1961, the award celebrates the achievements of the first president of NLADA.

Clayton is an attorney who has dedicated her life to fighting for indigent clients caught up in the criminal justice system – both locally and statewide. Like von Briesen, Clayton is generous with her time and talent and is a fierce courtroom litigator. Her contributions to improve the delivery of indigent services include her work with the Innocence Project of Texas (IPTX), the Lubbock Private Defenders Office, the Amicus Committee of the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (TCDLA), the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (a Delphi member on a statewide weighted caseload study on appeals) and her work with individual clients unable to afford counsel.

IPTX is a small non-profit organization that litigates the claims of innocent people who have been wrongly convicted of serious felonies, educates the public about IPTX's work, and seeks legislative reforms to prevent wrongful convictions. Clayton dedicates at least 50-60 hours every week to IPTX, as she is the lead attorney on 30-40 cases while serving as an administrator sustaining day-to-day operations. Through her work with IPTX, she has secured the release of a number of wrongly accused individuals with the assistance of her students.

As part of her work with IPTX, Clayton is the Adjunct Professor and Director of the Innocence Clinic at Texas Tech School of Law. In that role, Clayton not only teaches her students about innocence litigation, but she guides each of them as they work on active cases. Under her guidance, students investigate cases, interview witnesses and clients, and file litigation for their clients. "Allison's passionate pursuit of justice for her clients is infectious," said Jack Wade Nowlin, dean of the Texas Tech School of Law. "She exemplifies the effective and ethical practice of law every day. These traits are reflected in the work and dedication of all her students. We are very fortunate to have Allison training our students and are so proud to count her among our alumni."

Clayton also serves as the Chair of the Amicus Committee for TCDLA, an organization that aims to protect and ensure by rule of law those individual rights guaranteed by the Texas and Federal Constitutions in criminal cases; to resist the constant efforts which are now being made to curtail such rights: to encourage cooperation between lawyers engaged in the furtherance of such objectives through educational programs and other assistance; and through such cooperation, education and assistance to promote justice and the common good.

Her statewide effort for reform involves the Court of Criminal Appeals, the highest appellate court for criminal matters in Texas. One of the amicus briefs Clayton wrote involved the ability of habeas litigants to amend their pleadings. These people are not only indigent, they are also pro se and incarcerated. Clayton, who has a unique understanding of habeas law, wrote the brief to the Court of Criminal Appeals highlighting the plight of incarcerated, pro se litigants. She asked the



Court to consider their position and urged them to create a rule reasonable, both for the system and for the litigants. The Court of Criminal Appeals went on to craft a rule inspired by Clayton's advocacy.

Her contribution does not end there. On an individual level, Clayton has changed the lives of many of her clients for believing their stories and fighting for the justice they deserve. One of her clients wrote on social media thanking Clayton. Her client wrote, "Thank you for thinking of me to share my experiences and insights Allison! What helps me heal the most from wrongful conviction is knowing there are people out there who care enough about what I experienced to learn from it and do their part to make the world a more just and fair place. Thank you!"

For years, Allison Clayton has tirelessly gone above and beyond for the indigent, winning many cases. Even the cases she loses, she still keeps fighting for the cause – looking for different ways to attack a problem. She is a leader both locally and statewide. The ones who have benefitted the most from Allison's work are the poor unable to hire counsel. "It takes less than five minutes of speaking with her to understand that she is dedicated, passionate, selfless, and cares deeply about every one of her clients and the justice system," said Mark Hocker, Judge, Lubbock County Court at Law #1.

For more information on NLADA and the Arthur von Briesen Award, visit www.nlada.org/About.

The Lubbock Private Defenders Office, a 501(c) non-profit corporation, administers and promotes quality, ethical, and effective criminal defense and mental health services to indigent adults facing a loss of liberty, thereby protecting the fair administration of justice. This type of program provides jurisdictions with an option for delivering quality indigent defense services that affords more direct oversight and accountability of the defense function. It also relieves the judiciary of the administrative burdens of managing indigent defense. www.lpdo.org