



THE CAPITAL AREA PRIVATE DEFENDER SERVICE

CAPDS Post-Conviction Division Recognized as First Recipient of the Jeff Blackburn Award by the State Bar of Texas

The Post-Conviction Division of the Capital Area Private Defender Service in Austin, which includes The Forensic Project, the CAPDS Wrongful Conviction Project, and the Mitigation Advancement Program, received an award from the State Bar for its significant contribution to the empowerment and improvement of indigent defense

AUSTIN, June 12, 2026 – The Capital Area Private Defender Service (CAPDS), a non-profit aimed at improving indigent defense in Texas, today announced its Post-Conviction Division is honored to be the first recipient of the Jeff Blackburn Award from the State Bar of Texas.

The award honors Mr. Blackburn’s legacy and his goal of improving the systems that empower and improve indigent criminal defense in Texas. The award is given to a Texas-based organization for its significant contribution to innovation in the field of indigent criminal defense, its fight to dismantle systemic injustice and inequality in the criminal legal system, and its focus on indigent criminal defense representation.

The CAPDS Post-Conviction Division includes The Forensic Project, the CAPDS Wrongful Conviction Project, and the Mitigation Advancement Program. The Forensic Project APD DNA Review Project is funded through an interlocal agreement between Travis County and the City of Austin to review and litigate wrongful convictions that may have occurred due to the use of flawed DNA science by the now-shuttered Austin Police Department DNA laboratory. The Forensic Project DPS DNA Mixture Review Project is funded by Travis County to review and litigate wrongful convictions that may have occurred due to the use of flawed DNA science by the Department of Public Safety DNA laboratory. Cases litigated by The Forensic Project have resulted in the exonerations of two clients and the recommendation by a district court judge for post-conviction relief for a third.

The CAPDS Wrongful Conviction Project is funded by the Department of Justice and Travis County and focuses on the review and litigation of wrongful conviction cases in Travis County. The Mitigation Advancement Program is generously funded by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission and focuses on training and providing resources for attorneys defending indigent clients in violent felony cases on the development and use of mitigation evidence.

The CAPDS Post-Conviction Division is composed entirely of women and includes Director of Post-Conviction and Mitigation Advancement Stacie Lieberman, Senior Supervising Staff Attorney Jane Eggers, Staff Attorneys Natasha Hess, Belinda Wright, and Courtney Lewis, Investigator Christen Chipman, and Paralegal Claudia Aranda.



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“We are humbled to be the first recipients of the Jeff Blackburn Award, are extremely grateful for this recognition from the State Bar, and hope that our continued work will honor Mr. Blackburn’s legacy,” said Ms. Lieberman. “We are immensely thankful to the State Bar for this recognition and grateful for the unwavering support from Travis County and the Austin criminal defense bar.”

“The women of the CAPDS Post-Conviction Division are unsurpassed, undaunted, unrelenting, and undeterred in the pursuit of justice for their clients,” said Bradley Hargis, CAPDS Executive Director. “They have strengthened a project they inherited, created new programs to address emerging client needs, and have done so with determination and grace. The award is well-deserved.”

“The CAPDS Post-Conviction Division provides an invaluable service to Travis County by giving access to counsel that would not otherwise be available to the wrongfully convicted and has a stellar success rate,” said Rick Flores, the Presiding Director of the Austin Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. “The deep commitment of the team to justice for their clients and their resilience under pressure are a model for how indigent defense programs should work.”

For more information, please visit www.capds.org, www.theforensicproject.org, and www.mitigationadvancement.org.

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