



TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

209 W. 14th St., Room 202
Austin, Texas 78701

Contact: Marissa Kubinski
512-936-6994

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Professor Norman Lefstein Presented with Dawson Indigent Defense Distinguished Service Award

AUSTIN – The Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) today awarded the Robert O. Dawson Indigent Defense Distinguished Service Award to Norman Lefstein, Professor of Law and Dean Emeritus of the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis.

The TIDC presented the award to Professor Lefstein for his career working to improve indigent defense in Texas and throughout the United States. His Texas contributions include many presentations at professional development events, consulting on the TIDC's weighted caseload study, and as lead project designer of the Comal County Client Choice Project, which has successfully implemented the nation's first program in which indigent clients select the attorney to represent them.

“Professor Lefstein has been generous with his time and expertise in support of TIDC projects to improve Texas’ system of providing representation to the poor,” Judge Sharon Keller, the chair of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission and presiding judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals, said. “His contributions were essential to completing an outstanding attorney caseload study for Texas.”

Jim Bethke, Executive Director of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, said, “Professor Lefstein’s entire career has been as a national leader for indigent defense improvements. He was one of the first to identify the potential of improving indigent defense through client selection of counsel in the United States based on its successful implementation abroad and was instrumental in bringing this innovative concept to life in the pilot project in Comal County.”

“Professor Lefstein’s expertise in the use of a Delphi Panel was critical to the success of the Texas caseload study,” said Dr. Dottie Carmichael. “The guidance he provided to attorneys serving on the Panel makes us confident their final recommendations align with state and national professional standards for effective defense.” Dr. Carmichael is a research scientist at Texas A&M University’s Public Policy Research Institute and served as the principal investigator on Texas’ first weighted caseload study to develop [guidelines for indigent defense caseloads](#).

Professor Lefstein has served as Director of the Public Defender Service of the District of Columbia (PDS), one of the most well-regarded public defense organizations in the United States. During his time as director of PDS, he started a program for criminal law professors to spend time working at PDS, usually during a sabbatical from their law schools. The agency provided the professors an office and an opportunity to be appointed to cases, and the professors agreed to serve as a legal resource for our lawyers. One of the professors was none other than Robert O. Dawson, for whom this award is named!

Professor Lefstein also chaired the Indiana Public Defender Commission for 17 years. He has served as a chair and member of the Indigent Defense Advisory Group of the American Bar Association (ABA), as well as serving multiple terms as a member and special consultant to the ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants among many other leadership positions in the bar in which he has been at the heart of efforts to develop indigent defense policies. Professor Lefstein's recent work has focused on the problem of high caseloads in public defense, a pressing issue in some Texas jurisdictions. He is the author of the book *Securing Reasonable Caseloads: Ethics and Law in Public Defense*, published by the ABA in 2011.

About the Robert O. Dawson Award

The Robert O. Dawson award honors the late Professor Dawson's outstanding contributions to improving Texas' indigent defense system and honors outstanding service and contributions to the improvement in the way Texas provides counsel for its poorest citizens accused of crimes.

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