



American College of Trial Lawyers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Stephen B. Bright Receives Griffin Bell Award for Courageous Advocacy
From The American College of Trial Lawyers**
Bright is only the sixteenth person to receive award

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIF., MARCH 11, 2019 -- The American College of Trial Lawyers (the College) has presented its Griffin Bell Award for Courageous Advocacy to Stephen B. Bright during the 2019 Spring Meeting in La Quinta, California. The award honors trial lawyers who have persevered in the pursuit of an important cause despite substantial personal danger, fear, unpopularity, opposition or other extreme difficulties. In its 55 years of existence, the award has been extended previously only 15 times.

According to the award committee's nomination: "He has devoted his life to the representation of the poor, and most particularly to the representation of individuals confronting the death penalty, many of whom received inadequate representation at the trial level. He is seen as the model of a lawyer who advances the interests of justice under very difficult circumstances. He cares deeply about the individuals he represented. He brought humanity to individuals who others treated as inhuman based on their commission of awful crimes. Among other things, Mr. Bright has argued-and won-four death penalty appeals in the Supreme Court. One article pointed out that Justice Blackmun described an argument by him as the best argument of the year. He has been fearless on behalf of his clients and in dealing with judges who often seemed determined to impose a death sentence. His skills as a teacher are described as secondary to the instruction and example he has provided for those who would carry on the work of opposing discrimination and injustice in general, and the death penalty in particular. He has been a public and aggressive advocate for the cause of justice. He represents unselfishness, humility, and deep personal love and caring for the least of those in our society."

College President **Jeffrey S. Leon, LSM** of Bennett Jones LLP in Toronto, Ontario said, "Stephen honors the College with his acceptance of this prestigious award recognizing his contribution to the preservation of the rule of law and the advancement of the administration of justice. He makes us better and inspires us, not only as trial lawyers, but also as people who believe in justice."

Regent **Richard H. Deane, Jr.** of the Jones Day law firm in Atlanta, Georgia., presented the award to Mr. Bright. Mr. Deane said of Mr. Bright, "You embody the ideals to which trial lawyers aspire. By your example, you inspire and motivate Fellows of the College, and members of the profession at large. In honoring you, we're not unmindful of the victims in the many cases you have pursued, or the fact that many may continue to support capital punishment. Nonetheless, the College respects, honors, and appreciates the personal commitment, the quality advocacy, and the courage that has sustained your opposition to the death penalty, as well as your ability to maintain the highest standards of integrity and professionalism in the course of that work. You have demonstrated every characteristic that the College expects in a Griffon Bell award recipient."

In his acceptance remarks, Mr. Bright said, "I've been honored to be the lawyer for some of these people [with capital cases]. I've been honored to be able to take their case and message to sometimes the Supreme Court, but much more often to courts all about the land in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, and other places.... Last year only forty-one people were sentenced to death in the entire United States of America. The year before that thirty-nine, the year before that thirty-seven. We've gone from 315 to that number and it shows this, it shows that lawyer matters. It shows that good lawyers, capable lawyers who know what they're doing, know how to investigate for mitigation, know

what issues to raise, know how to present cases, most importantly, to prosecutors to negotiate cases out. That's how those cases are being solved.

“I urge you to do everything you can with regard giving people the opportunity to be represented by capable lawyers in all kinds of cases. There’s no small case, I tell my students. There’s no small case if you’re the person who’s facing it and that we end this long nightmare of racial discrimination in our court system,” he said.

Mr. Bright has been a fellow or visiting lecturer at Yale Law School since 1993, has served as director, president, and senior counsel of the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, and since 2017, has been professor of practice at the Georgia State College of Law. Mr. Bright has tried capital cases before juries in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, argued four capital cases before the Supreme Court, and argued many other cases before state and federal appellate courts. Subjects of his litigation, teaching, and writing include capital punishment, legal representation for poor people accused of crimes, conditions and practices in prisons and jails, racial discrimination in the criminal justice system, and judicial independence. He received the American Bar Association’s Thurgood Marshall Award in 1998. The *Fulton Daily Law Report*, a legal newspaper in Georgia, named him “Newsmaker of the Year” in 2003 for his contribution to bringing about creation of a public defender system in Georgia. Before joining the Southern Center, he was a legal services attorney in Appalachia, and a public defender and director of a law school clinical program in Washington, D.C.

The Griffin Bell Award is one of the highest honors conferred by the College upon an individual trial lawyer and recognizes lawyers who have persevered in pursuit of an important cause despite substantial personal danger, fear, unpopularity, opposition, or other difficulties. The award was created in 1964 and re-named in 2008 for Griffin Bell. It may be given to any trial lawyer, whether or not a Fellow of the College, who has demonstrated outstanding courage in unpopular or difficult cases. The award was last presented to Andrew J. Savage III of Savage Law Firm in Charleston, SC on September 29, 2018 at the College’s Annual Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. Griffin Bell was an attorney and judge of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. He served as the United States Attorney General during President Jimmy Carter’s administration. Bell served as ACTL president in 1985-1986.

About The American College of Trial Lawyers

The American College of Trial Lawyers is composed of preeminent members of the Trial Bar from the United States and Canada and is recognized as the leading trial lawyers organization in both countries. The College is dedicated to maintaining and seeking to improve the standards of trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice. The College strongly supports the independence of the Judiciary and respect for the courts in the United States and Canada; that independence is fundamental to democratic societies. For more information about the College, visit its website at www.actl.com.

Photo Available:

A photo of President Jeffrey S. Leon, LSM presenting Stephen Bright the Griffin Bell Award for Courageous Advocacy during the General Session on Friday, March 1, 2019 at the College’s Spring Meeting in La Quinta, California is available. Please contact Eliza Gano.

Contact:

Eliza Gano
American College of Trial Lawyers
Communications Manager
egano@actl.com
949.752.1801

###