



# American College of Trial Lawyers

## AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS SELECTS TULANE LAW SCHOOL WOMEN'S PRISON PROJECT AS 2020 EMIL GUMPERT AWARD RECIPIENT *\$100,000 Grant to Assist with Access to Justice Fellow*

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIF. (April 27, 2020) - The American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) has selected the Tulane Law School Women's Prison Project (WPP) as the 2020 Emil Gumpert Award recipient. WPP is being recognized for its proposal to create an inaugural Access to Justice Fellow who would spend 18 months dedicated to a project that expands access to justice for incarcerated women.

The award, the highest honor conferred by the American College of Trial Lawyers on a single organization annually, recognizes programs whose principal purpose is to maintain and improve the administration of justice. It comes with a \$100,000 grant.

"We're grateful to the American College of Trial Lawyers for this very significant recognition and support," said Tulane Law School Dean David Meyer. "The Women's Prison Project is an innovative and important extension of Tulane's proud leadership in clinical service and education, and its work has only grown more urgent in the current crisis."

The Women's Prison Project is a first-of-its-kind collaboration between Tulane's Domestic Violence and Criminal Justice clinics and focuses on providing legal representation to domestic violence survivors charged or imprisoned after killing an abuser or for having committed crimes under an abuser's coercion or duress. Clinic students get hands-on legal training and the women receive representation on their legal cases, and at their parole or clemency hearings.

"This award presents an opportunity to shed light on an issue few people even know about. Too many incarcerated women continue to serve long or life sentences for killing abusive partners, often decades ago and long before our societal understandings of domestic violence evolved into what they are today," said Tulane Domestic Violence Clinic Director Becki Kondkar. "Their decades of incarceration have rendered them invisible – now it's both necessary and urgent that we bring their stories back into the public consciousness."

The \$100,000 grant will create an inaugural Access to Justice Fellow at Tulane who would spend 18 months dedicated to expanding access to justice to imprisoned women. The Fellow would expand the WPP's current reach by creating a model how-to program, developing a practice manual, training modules, and a social science resource bank that can be replicated around the country, giving women who represent themselves access to the legal materials they need.

ACTL President **Douglas R. Young** observed: "'Access to Justice' is one of the core values embedded in the College's formal Mission Statement. Nowhere has that principle been more deserving of support than in the cases of women who have been jailed for defending against an abusive partner or for participating in a crime under duress from an abusive partner. The issues are complex, sometimes subtle, difficult even for lawyers to comprehend and present, and vitally important insofar as they encompass such life dilemmas as domestic violence, abuse, and trauma. The College fully embraces the visionary work of the Tulane Law School Women's Prison Project in creating its inaugural Access to Justice Fellow. By developing a model program to 'educate, train, and provide resources for incarcerated women' in post-conviction proceedings, where the right to counsel does not exist, the Women's Prison Project will significantly expand the rights of those who deserve to have their life stories fully presented in the context



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of legal proceedings where those stories may make a difference. The College is proud to assist this creative and much-needed project, which will thrive in the spirit of the Emil Gumpert Award.”

In addition to the Fellow’s work, the WPP, in partnership with the American Bar Association’s Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence (of which Kondkar is a member) would create a national publication, a webinar, and presentations at two national conferences to encourage the Project’s wider application in other jurisdictions. At Tulane, the training project will be sustained by future generations of clinic students.

## **About the [Emil Gumpert Award](#)**

The Emil Gumpert Award is the highest honor conferred by the College on any organization and was established to recognize programs whose principal purpose is to maintain and improve the administration of justice. The programs considered may be associated with courts, law schools, bar associations or any other organization that provides such a program. This award is made in honor of the late Honorable Emil Gumpert, Chancellor-Founder of the American College of Trial Lawyers. Judge Gumpert, throughout his more than half-century professional career as an eminent trial lawyer, State Bar president and trial judge, substantially and effectively devoted himself to the administration of justice and to the improvement of trial practice.

## **About the [American College of Trial Lawyers](#)**

The American College of Trial Lawyers comprises the best of the trial bar from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico and is widely considered to be the premier professional trial organization in North America. Founded in 1950, the College is an invitation only fellowship. The College thoroughly investigates each nominee for admission and selects only those who have demonstrated the very highest standards of trial advocacy, ethical conduct, integrity, professionalism and collegiality. The College maintains and seeks to improve the standards of trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice through education and public statements on important legal issues relating to its mission. The College strongly supports the independence of the judiciary, trial by jury, respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and fair and just representation of all parties to legal proceedings.

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