

## **Panelist Biographies**

## **Texys Morris**

### **Panel One – Through the Eyes of New Assistant Public Defenders**

#### **Tosif Chouhan**

Born and raised in Atlanta, Ga., Tosif Chouhan graduated with his bachelor's degree from Georgia State University where he double majored in Risk Management Insurance and Operations Management. Chouhan then attended Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where he attained his Juris Doctor in 2010. Immediately after taking the bar exam, Chouhan began working with a private law firm where he aided in defending numerous criminal cases on both the federal and state levels. It was after this experience that Chouhan gained his passion for criminal defense work. Today, Chouhan is a public defender with the Fulton County Public Defender's Office located in Atlanta, Ga. He defends indigent clients facing felony charges in Fulton County Superior Court. Chouhan has a passion for criminal defense and is a proud member of the most recent class of Gideon's Promise graduates. Chouhan's professional memberships include the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, the American Bar Association and the Young Lawyers Division of the Georgia Bar. In his free time, Chouhan enjoys cheering for his Atlanta sports teams, spending time with his wife and participating in organized road racing events throughout the Southeast.

#### **Azi Golshan**

Azi Golshan is a first-year attorney with the Coweta Judicial Circuit Public Defender Office. She is the sole juvenile public defender in Coweta County, representing youth in both felony and misdemeanor cases. Golshan also defends parents accused of child abuse and neglect by the Department of Family and Children Services, and she serves as a defense attorney in the Adult Drug Court. Golshan frequently tries cases, routinely writes appeals and is quickly developing a reputation as a "rabble rouser" who never stops fighting for her clients. She is a 2012 graduate of Georgia Law, where she was inducted into the Order of the Coif and was a proud participant in the school's Criminal Defense Clinic. When she is not in court, Golshan loves going to farmers markets and exploring with her wild and crazy puppy.

Texys Morris grew up in Maysville, Ga. Following completion of her undergraduate studies at the University of Virginia, Morris volunteered with the U.S. Peace Corps in Lesotho, Africa, from 2004 to 2006. In 2007-08, she worked in Washington, D.C., for Bread for the City, a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive services to low-income people, including food, clothing, medical care, and legal and social services. She enrolled at Georgia Law in the fall of 2008. While in law school, Morris spent her summers interning at the New Orleans Public Defender Office and the Bronx Defenders. She also participated in the law school's Criminal Defense Clinic during her second and third years of study. Additionally, she co-founded the school's Public Interest Law Council and was presented with the Ellen Jordan Public Interest Award and the Working in the Public Interest Award from the Equal Justice Foundation. Following graduation in 2011, she was awarded an E. Barrett Prettyman Fellowship in the LL.M. Program at the Georgetown University Law Center. Through the fellowship, Morris represented indigent juveniles and adults charged with offenses in Washington, D.C., and supervised law students handling juvenile delinquency cases in Georgetown's clinical program. She completed the fellowship in 2013. Morris is now working with the Jefferson County Public Defender Office in Birmingham, Ala., which is in its inaugural year of operation.

#### **Elizabeth Taxel**

Elizabeth Taxel is an assistant public defender in the Office of the Public Defender for the Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit. Previously, she served in the Public Defender Office for the Clayton Judicial Circuit. Before attending law school, Taxel worked at an orphanage for homeless children recovering from trauma and drug abuse in Nicaragua, conducted adult education workshops in rural El Salvador and spent three years assisting Latino immigrants in Athens, Ga., through Catholic Social Services. While working at Catholic Social Services, Taxel provided direct services to clients; created legal and health advocacy programs; and trained, supervised and organized social work interns and volunteer translators. Exceptionally active in a variety of public interest causes while a student at Georgia Law, Taxel worked with the law school's Family Violence Clinic, its Public Interest Practicum and its Criminal Defense Clinic in addition to the Georgia Legal Services Program and UGA's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. She was presented with the law school's

Ellen Jordan Public Interest Award, the school's highest honor given to students for their public interest work. Taxel is a graduate of the Gideon's Promise Class of 2010 and "Core 101" and is a member of the Graduate "201" Program. She received her B.A., *magna cum laude*, from McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, in 2001 and her J.D. from UGA in 2009. She recently became a barrister of the law school's Joseph Henry Lumpkin Inn of Court, and she is a native of Athens, Ga.

### **Erica J. Hashimoto – Moderator**

Erica J. Hashimoto joined the Georgia Law faculty in the fall of 2004. She teaches courses in criminal law, evidence and sentencing, and she supervises the school's Appellate Litigation Clinic, which takes appointed cases from federal appellate courts. Hashimoto served four years as an assistant federal public defender in the Office of the Federal Public Defender in Washington, D.C., gaining significant trial experience representing clients charged with a variety of federal crimes, including the possession of guns and drugs, fraud and threats on the president. Prior to working at the federal defender office, Hashimoto served as a judicial clerk for Judge David S. Tatel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (1999-2000) and for Judge Paul L. Friedman of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (1997-1999). Hashimoto earned her bachelor's degree with honors from Harvard University and her law degree, *magna cum laude*, from Georgetown University.

## **Panel Two – Circuit Public Defenders: Advocating from Within**

### **John Donnelly**

John Donnelly is the circuit public defender for the Western Judicial Circuit, which includes Athens-Clarke and Oconee counties. The public defender office in Athens was started in the late 1960s, and Donnelly first represented clients in the office as a third-year law student participating in Georgia Law's Legal Aid and Defender Clinic. While a student, he argued and won his first motion to suppress before Superior Court Chief Judge Joseph Gaines of the Western Judicial Circuit. Following law school, Donnelly practiced law in California and then returned to Athens as an assistant public defender in 1994. From 2005 to 2010, Donnelly was the chief assistant public defender. During his long tenure as a public defender, Donnelly has represented clients in every court the Western Circuit has to offer – from Municipal Court to Superior Court – handling matters such as juvenile curfew violations and driving without a license to murder. In his words, Donnelly was "born shortly after *Gideon* was decided." He earned his B.A. from the University of Florida and his J.D. from UGA in 1992. Donnelly attended the National Criminal Defense College in 1996.

### **Michael L. Edwards**

Michael L. Edwards is the Eastern Judicial Circuit public defender and is currently serving his third term in this position. A native of Oxford, Ga., Edwards received his B.A., *magna cum laude*, from Georgia Southern College in 1990 and his J.D. from UGA in 1993. He was admitted to the State Bar of Georgia that same year. He is also admitted to practice in all state and federal trial and appellate courts in Georgia and the U.S. Supreme Court. In addition to his Georgia Bar membership, Edwards is a member of the Savannah Bar Association, the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (GACDL) and the Savannah Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. Edwards previously served as the circuit public defenders' representative on the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council (GPDSC), where he chaired its CPD Committee and was a member of its Budget Committee. He is past president of the Georgia Association of Circuit Public Defenders and is a member of the organization's Training Committee and Legislative Committee. As a

member of the Training Committee, Edwards has lectured at training sessions conducted by the GPDSC, the GACDL and the NACDL. As a member of the Legislative Committee, Edwards has testified before the Georgia Legislature on various issues related to the Indigent Defense Act and criminal law. Edwards is past president of the Savannah Bar Association, where he served for many years prior on the Executive Committee. He is presently secretary of the Chatham County Criminal Justice Information System Board and a member of both the Chatham County Drug Court and Mental Health Court Advisory Boards.

### **Leisa Johnson**

Leisa Johnson is the circuit public defender in the Dougherty Judicial Circuit. She was raised in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and received her Bachelor of Science degree, *magna cum laude*, from the University of Maryland at College Park in 1985. She then received her Juris Doctor from George Washington University in 1988. She was admitted to the Maryland Bar that same year, to the District of Columbia Bar in 1989, to the Georgia Bar in 1992 and was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2008. Johnson previously worked as an assistant county attorney and a public defender in Maryland before moving to her mother's hometown of Albany, Ga., in 1999. She served four years as an assistant district attorney under the leadership of the former District Attorney Ken Hodges. After leaving there, Johnson started a successful private law practice, focusing primarily on criminal defense work throughout Southwest Georgia. In July 2004, she was appointed to start the first statewide Public Defender Office in the Dougherty Judicial Circuit, which represents indigent clients who are charged with felony offenses in Dougherty County and represents juveniles in Juvenile Court. Johnson has 15 staff members consisting of one chief assistant public defender, seven assistant public defenders, two investigators, two administrative assistants and three legal secretaries. She is a proud resident of Dougherty County and is equally proud to be a public servant of the community.

### **Claudia Saari**

Claudia Saari is the interim circuit public defender for the Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit. Since joining the office in 1987, Saari has tried a wide variety of cases, ranging from DUI to death penalty cases. She has been a faculty member for the public defender training program in Georgia –

Gideon's Promise – and the Trial Techniques Program at Emory University School of Law and has given numerous presentations on criminal law and public interest law topics. Saari serves on a number of committees and boards including the Indigent Defense Committee and the Criminal Justice Reform Committee for the State Bar of Georgia, the Board of Directors for Gideon's Promise and the Advisory Board for the Emory Public Interest Law Committee. She also served for two years as the chairperson for the Public Defender Committee for the American College of Trial Lawyers. Saari received a bachelor's degree from Brown University in 1984 and a law degree from Emory University in 1987. She is a graduate of Leadership DeKalb, a master with the Lumpkin Inns of Court, a member of the State Bar Board of Governors, a member of the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism and a Fellow with the American College of Trial Lawyers. In 2009, Saari was the recipient of the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers Indigent Defense Award.

### **Russell Gabriel – Moderator**

Russell Gabriel is the director of Georgia Law's Criminal Defense Clinic. From 1988 to 2005, he was a public defender in Georgia, working primarily in the public defender office in Athens and for three years in the Federal Defender Program in Atlanta. From 1996 to 2005, he served as the director of the UGA Legal Aid and Defender Clinic, which was the public defender office for the Western Judicial Circuit. He has represented clients in criminal matters in Juvenile, Municipal, Magistrate, State and Superior Courts; the Georgia Court of Appeals; the Georgia Supreme Court; the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Georgia and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. Gabriel received a B.A. from the University of Michigan, with honors, in 1978; a J.D. from UGA, *cum laude*, in 1985, and an LL.M. from Harvard Law School in 1987. He is a member of the Indigent Defense Committee of the State Bar of Georgia and the Indigent Defense Committee of the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. Prior to entering law school, Gabriel made clay pots, in association with the Happy Valley Pottery in Farmington, Ga.

## Lunchtime Special Guest Speaker

### Ilham Askia

Ilham Askia is the executive director and co-founder of Gideon's Promise, a non-profit organization that recruits, trains and provides mentorship to new public defenders working in public defender offices throughout the South. The organization's goal is to train and mobilize new public defenders to provide the highest quality of defense representation to people unable to afford an attorney. At Gideon's Promise, Askia works with new public defenders in developing a client centered approach in their practice. She is responsible for recruiting new public defenders as well as developing and maintaining relationships with offices throughout the Southeast. She manages the Leadership Summit for public defender chiefs, the Summer Law Clerk Program for 1st, 2nd and 3rd year law students, the three-year Core 101 program for new public defenders and the 201 Graduate level trainings. Askia also monitors and administers the organization's annual budget; updates and ensures implementation of by-laws, personnel policies, the strategic plan and other policies approved by the Board of Directors; and ensures the organization complies with all local, state and federal regulations. Prior to her work with Gideon's Promise, Askia taught elementary and high school in the public school systems in Washington, D.C., and Fulton County, Ga. In Washington, while teaching high school students, she designed the English curriculum for academically challenged high school students at the Maya Angelou Public Charter School and facilitated teacher workshops on topics such as Differentiation in the Classroom and Kinesthetic Learning. In her first year in the D.C. public school system, as a Teach for America corps member, Askia was nominated for new teacher of the year in the District of Columbia. As a second year teacher, she taught elementary school practices in Kawasaki, Japan, as a Mid-Atlantic Japan in Schools Fellow through the University of Maryland. She also served as a representative at the D.C. Superintendent's Roundtable Discussion to refine curriculum and school operations in the district. While working in the Fulton County Public School System in Georgia, Askia served as chair of the first grade team and as a member of the Principal's Leadership Team. She received her Master's degree in Teaching from Trinity University in Washington, D.C., and her B.S. degree from Cornell University.

## Panel Three – Indigent Defense Advocates: Advocating from Outside the System

### Stephen B. Bright

Stephen B. Bright is president and senior counsel of the Southern Center for Human Rights and teaches at Yale Law School and at Georgia Law. He served as director of the center from 1982 through 2005, and has been in his present position since the start of 2006. He has taught at Yale since 1993. 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, judicial independence and sentencing. He has tried cases, including capital cases, before juries and argued cases before state and federal appellate courts. He has twice argued and won cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Snyder v. Louisiana*, 552 U.S. 472 (2008), and *Amadeo v. Zant*, 486 U.S. 214 (1988). Both cases involved racial discrimination in the composition of the juries. He has testified on many occasions before committees of both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. He has also taught at the law schools at Harvard, Georgetown, Emory and Northeastern. His and the center's work has been the subject of the documentary film "Finding for Life in the Death Belt" (EM Productions 2005) and two books, *Proximity to Death* by William McFeely (Norton, 1999) and *Finding Life on Death Row* by Kayta Lezin (Northeastern University Press, 1999). He received the American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award in 1998, the American Civil Liberties Union's Roger Baldwin Medal of Liberty in 1991, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association's Kutak-Dodds Prize in 1992 and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers' Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008 as well as several honorary degrees and other recognitions. Additionally, the *Daily Report* named Bright "Newsmaker (and Agitator) of the Year" in 2003 for his contribution to bringing about the creation of a public defender system in Georgia.

### Mike Caplan

Mike Caplan is an associate with the Atlanta law firm of Bondurant, Mixon and Elmore. His practice focuses on complex business litigation, including class actions, antitrust, securities and constitutional litigation in state and federal courts. Caplan has been recognized for his work in important and precedent-setting constitutional and civil rights cases, and he

has been asked to represent and advise lawyers and judges in sensitive matters involving election law, professional conduct and criminal justice. Caplan, along with the Southern Center for Human Rights and other attorneys, brought the case of *Flournoy v. Georgia Public Defender Standards Council, et al.*, a class action which focused on the failure to provide defense counsel in appellate cases and led to significant reforms to appellate representation in Georgia's indigent defense system. For that work, Caplan was honored with the Southern Center for Human Rights' inaugural Gideon's Promise Award. Caplan is also co-counsel to a class of foster children in *Kenny A v. Perdue*. Caplan is an active member of the Indigent Defense Committee of the Georgia State Bar. He has received three degrees from UGA: his B.A. in 2002, his M.B.A. in 2005 and his J.D., *magna cum laude*, in 2006, where he served as articles editor of the *Georgia Law Review* and was inducted into the Order of the Coif. Following law school, Caplan served as a judicial clerk to U.S. District Court Judge Richard W. Story in Atlanta.

### **Sharon Nelson Hill**

Sharon Nelson Hill is the founding executive director of the Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice. Before joining the center in 2005, Hill served on the bench of the Fulton County Juvenile Court as an associate judge for more than eight years. Hill began her legal career in 1985 in private practice with Sutherland, Asbill and Brennan. From 1989 to 1995, Hill worked as a staff attorney for the Atlanta Legal Aid Society and focused on poverty law and representing people living with HIV/AIDS. Hill returned to private practice with the firm of Troutman Sanders in the mid-90s and also served as the staff attorney for the Special Judiciary Committee of the Georgia Senate during the 1997 legislative session. Hill joined the Fulton County Juvenile Court in 1997. Among other cases, Hill heard all truancy cases filed by the Atlanta and Fulton County School Systems for more than five years, founded the Education Advocacy Program Advisory Committee, piloted the implementation of Model Court (deprivation) over three years and was the judge for the first Family Drug Court in Georgia. Since joining the Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice in 2005, Hill has continued her service in the community through advisory and leadership positions with the Chief Justice-Led Task Force to Promote Criminal Justice/Mental Health Collaboration, the Committee on Civil Justice for the Georgia Equal Justice Commission and the State Bar of Georgia's Children and the Courts Committee. Hill helped form, and continues to serve on, the Executive Committee of the State Bar's new Child Advocacy and

Protection Section. She is also a member of the Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children and the State Bar's Indigent Defense Committee. As a member of her faith community, Hill chaired the Board of Trustees and the Board of Mission and Action. After graduating from Williams College, Hill completed her joint J.D./M.B.A. degree at Emory University, graduating with distinction. Hill and her husband, Ben, have a daughter who is a student at UGA.

### **Atteeyah Hollie**

Atteeyah Hollie has been a staff attorney with the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta since 2010. Her practice focuses on improving the quality of legal representation provided to poor people accused of crime and challenging debtors' prisons and unconstitutional prison conditions. For five years prior to entering law school, Hollie worked as an investigator for the Southern Center's Impact Litigation Unit. In this capacity, she was instrumental in locating and bringing forward individual defendants, and families of defendants, who could provide personal insight into the condition of indigent defense representation in Georgia. This work contributed to the filing of *Hampton v. Forrester*, a class action challenging the inadequate provision of counsel for poor people accused of crime in the Cordele Judicial Circuit. The *Hampton* suit led to the creation of a pilot public defender system in the circuit, which became a model for other public defender offices that emerged across Georgia as a result of the Indigent Defense Act of 2003.

### **Russell Gabriel – Moderator**

Biography appears with previous panel biographies.

## **Panel Four – Discussing “Gideon’s Army”**

### **Brandon Slade Clark**

Brandon Slade Clark was born and raised in Brunswick, Ga., and graduated from Glynn Academy High School in 1994. He began college at Georgia Southern University and later transferred to Georgia Tech, where he earned a degree in Materials Engineering in the spring of 1999. Before earning his law degree, he practiced as an engineer primarily in consulting and materials testing. He completed his law degree in the spring of 2004 and sat for the July bar exam. Clark was subsequently hired by Steve Messinger and started as an assistant public defender in the Atlantic Circuit in January of 2005. He left Messinger’s office in the fall of 2007 and opened a solo practice focusing primarily on criminal defense, family law and civil litigation. He came back to the Public Defender’s Office in January 2009 and resumed his position as manager and lead counsel of the McIntosh County Office. He was selected by Chief Judge David L. Cavender to serve as interim circuit public defender before receiving his appointment as circuit public defender in March 2011. As a new assistant public defender, Clark was in the initial training offered through what is now Gideon's Promise. He continues to participate in the Leadership Summit sponsored by Gideon's Promise that connects public defender chiefs throughout different states across the nation.

### **Dawn Porter**

Dawn Porter founded Trilogy Films in 2007 and made her feature documentary directorial debut with “Gideon’s Army,” which premiered at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival where it won the Best Editing Award. “Gideon’s Army” recently had its broadcast television premiere on HBO, receiving rave reviews and high ratings – hailed as “essential...gripping and beautiful” by *Esquire* magazine and described by *The New York Times* as a “stirring” film. Porter was selected for the prestigious Tribeca All Access program, where she won the 2011 juried Creative Promise Award for “Gideon’s Army.” Named one of 2012’s Doc Hot Shots’ 15 Emerging Directors to Watch by *Realscreen* magazine and one of *The Independent’s* 10 Doc Filmmakers to Watch, Porter is currently producing and directing “Spies of Mississippi,” which will air on Independent Lens in 2014 and an episode of “America By The Numbers” for The Futuro Group, which will air on PBS in 2014. Other Trilogy projects include a documentary about celebrity Chef Alexandra Guarnaschelli for the Cooking Channel. Porter’s

work in narrative features began as executive producer of “Serious Moonlight,” written by Adrienne Shelley and starring Meg Ryan and Timothy Hutton. “Serious Moonlight” debuted at the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival and was released theatrically by Magnolia Pictures. The film had its broadcast premiere on the Lifetime Movie Network. Porter also executive produced “The Green,” an independent feature that premiered on the Showtime Network and starred Cheyenne Jackson of “30 Rock” and Emmy Award-winning actress Julia Ormond. Before becoming a filmmaker, Porter was the director of news standards and practices at ABC News and vice president of standards and practices at A&E Networks. Porter is a graduate of Swarthmore College and the Georgetown University Law Center. She was a practicing attorney at Baker & Hostetler and ABC Television Networks before beginning her television career.

### **Timothy Saviello**

Timothy Saviello has been an indigent defender his entire 19-year legal career. He has defended clients successfully at trial against the death penalty in Louisiana and won a reversal in a capital *habeas* case in Georgia. He is licensed in state courts in both Georgia and Louisiana as well as with the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court, where he has spent the past 13 years exclusively defending indigent clients against criminal charges. Saviello is also on the faculty of Gideon’s Promise, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing public defenders in the Southeast the highest quality training and reforming indigent defense. He has been a member of the faculty of this program since it began in 2005 and has lectured on all aspects of criminal defense trial practice as well as the philosophy of quality representation of indigent defendants. Since 2011, Saviello has been an associate professor at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, where he teaches in the areas of evidence, criminal procedure, white collar crime and criminal law ethics as well as in the Criminal Justice Honors Program. Saviello is a member of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

### **Travis Williams**

Travis Williams is an assistant public defender in the Northeastern Judicial Circuit Public Defender Office, which is based in Gainesville, Ga. He represents defendants on felony cases in the Superior Courts in Hall and

Dawson counties. Williams was raised in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and received his B.A. in Business Administration from Florida A&M University and his J.D. from UGA in 2008. He immediately began work at the public defender office in Gainesville, where he continues to practice. In 2011, he received the Assistant Public Defender of the Year Award from the Georgia Association of Circuit Public Defenders, and he is a graduate of the Gideon's Promise public defender training program. Williams is one of three attorneys featured in the film "Gideon's Army," which convincingly depicts his dedication to indigent defendants accused in the criminal justice system and his enthusiasm for the work of public defenders. In 2012, he was recognized as one of the *Daily Report's* "Rising Lawyers Under Forty."

### **Andrea L. Dennis – Moderator**

Andrea L. Dennis joined the Georgia Law faculty in the fall of 2010 as an associate professor. She came to UGA from the University of Kentucky College of Law, where she taught courses in criminal law and procedure, children and the law, and family law. Previously, Dennis served as an assistant federal public defender in the District of Maryland. She also worked for the D.C. Office of the Corporation Counsel civilly prosecuting child abuse and neglect cases. At Covington & Burling in Washington, D.C., Dennis practiced corporate and patent litigation and antitrust law as an associate. She also served as a judicial clerk for Judge Raymond A. Jackson of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. In addition to her legal experience, Dennis was a senior associate in the National Office of Job Corps for the U.S. Department of Labor, where she engaged in strategic analysis and planning for national vocational training programs for at-risk youth. Her scholarship focuses on the cradle-to-prison pipeline, criminal and juvenile defense lawyering, and snitching. She has published, or will publish, articles in the *Nebraska Law Review*, the *Marquette Law Review* (forthcoming 2014), the *American Criminal Law Review* and the *Columbia Journal of Law and the Arts*. Dennis earned her B.S. in Engineering with a psychology concentration from the University of Maryland and her J.D. from New York University, where she served on the *Annual Survey of American Law*.