



Colleen O'Connor, David Sorenson Receive WSBA Courageous Award

Seattle public defense attorneys honored for their work in State v. Michele Anderson

SEATTLE, WA [Sept. 30, 2016] — The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) presented Seattle attorneys **Colleen O'Connor** and **David Sorenson**, public defenders at the King County Department of Public Defense, with its 2016 Courageous Award. The award is in recognition of their work in *State v. Michele Anderson*, a capital case. WSBA President **Bill Hyslop** presented the award at the WSBA Annual Awards Dinner on Sept. 29, 2016, at the Sheraton Seattle. Also presented with the 2016 Courageous Award were two other teams of attorneys at DPD handling capital cases: **Leo Hamaji, William Prestia, and Kathryn Ross**; and **Todd Gruenhagen, Carl Luer, and Stacey MacDonald**. The three teams work for three different divisions within the department: O'Connor and Sorenson for the Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons (SCRAP) Division; Hamaji, Prestia, and Ross for The Defender Association Division; and Gruenhagen, Luer, and MacDonald for the Associated Counsel for the Accused Division.

O'Connor has been with SCRAP since 1996. Previously, she was a staff attorney at the Washington Appellate Defender Association. She serves as co-chair of the WACDL's Death Penalty Committee and is a volunteer and former board member of El Quetzal, a nonprofit organization working with indigenous women in Guatemala. O'Connor also serves as a volunteer judge for Seattle University School of Law students presenting appellate arguments as part of the legal writing program, and volunteers with the YMCA mock trial program for high schoolers, coordinated by the Hon. William Downing.

Sorenson has worked as a public defender in Kitsap, Skagit and Whatcom counties, and as a public defender in King County. He has also worked with the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions and the Seattle Office for Civil Rights. When he is not working on cases, Sorenson volunteers at his children's school.

Michele Anderson was convicted of joining her then-boyfriend, Joseph McEnroe, in the killing of six members of her family on Christmas Eve 2007 in rural Carnation. McEnroe was convicted of participating in the killings and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after the jury could not agree on the death penalty.

King County Prosecutor **Dan Satterberg** said he initially sought the death penalty against Anderson because the deaths met the criteria for seeking capital punishment. O'Connor and Sorenson asked Satterberg to consider mitigating factors, including Anderson's mental illness, and the defense's argument that McEnroe was more culpable for the homicides. The King County Prosecutor's Office announced in July 2015 that they were no longer seeking the death penalty for Anderson. In March 2016, Michele Anderson was found guilty of six counts of aggravated first-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of release.

"These three teams of King County public defenders took on difficult cases with heartbreaking facts and the ultimate potential consequence of the death penalty," said WSBA Governor **Ann Danieli**. "Two of these cases lasted for eight-plus years, including several appeals up to the Washington Supreme Court. It is an enormous undertaking to bring to life the dream of *Gideon v. Wainwright* — the dream of a vast, diverse country in which every person charged with a crime will be capably defended, no matter what his economic circumstances, and in which the lawyer representing them will do so proudly, without resentment at an unfair burden, sure of the support needed to make an adequate defense. These attorneys all lived up to that standard at the expense of their own well-being. The enormous stress of representing someone facing the death penalty is unfathomable. No matter what side of the death penalty controversy you are on, these attorneys deserve our admiration and recognition."

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About the Washington State Bar Association

The WSBA is part of the judicial branch and is authorized by the Washington Supreme Court to license the state's 36,089 lawyers and over 1,000 other legal professionals. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates lawyers and other legal professionals under the authority of the Court and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA's mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

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