

THE CONNECTICUT INNOCENCE FUND

Invitation to the James W. Cooper Fellows of the Connecticut Bar Foundation

March 8, 2011

In Connecticut as elsewhere around the country, we have learned that our criminal justice system occasionally wrongly convicts people who have been proven innocent of the crimes for which they were imprisoned. The Connecticut Innocence Project and others are doing much to find these cases of injustice and bring them to the courts to gain the release of these exonerees. But freedom is only the first step in the restoration of their lives. We as a society must find a way to help these individuals to regain meaningful lives.

To its great credit Connecticut has enacted a system of compensation for wrongly convicted individuals. But that system is slow, and has no mechanism to assist individuals immediately upon their release. For that reason, the Connecticut Bar Foundation, in partnership with Community Partners in Action, has approved a new undertaking, the Connecticut Innocence Fund. The Fund will provide short term financial assistance to newly released exonerees. It will be established through tax-deductible contributions, which will then be self-replenishing by repayment of the advances from exonerees' compensation awards.

This fund will be unique in the United States. There are several organizations around the country that assist exonerees with job placement and social service needs. But nowhere has a fund been specially established to help newly released exonerees with short-term needs. This is a chance for Connecticut to take a leadership position nationwide.

We invite any interested Fellows of the Connecticut Bar Foundation to assist in organizing the Fund. We will also be inviting participants from Community Partners in Action and from among the people who have assisted the Connecticut Innocence Project. An organizational meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. on March 21, 2011 at the offices of McCarter & English LLP, located at CityPlace 1, 36th Floor, 185 Asylum Street, Hartford, Connecticut. Directions and inclement weather information are attached.

At the organizational meeting we will hear a brief presentation from the leaders of the Connecticut Innocence Project about their work, and also meet with one or more of the exonerees who have been released in Connecticut. We will then discuss the goals and structure of the Connecticut Innocence Fund, and take steps to build its volunteer leadership and plan its initial operations.

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