

Rothko Symposium

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UH Law Center professor to discuss policies and reform efforts during three-day criminal justice symposium

Conference March 30-April 1 examines challenges and human toll of mass incarceration

March 27, 2017 — University of Houston Law Center Professor Sandra Guerra Thompson will discuss bail reform and challenges faced by incarcerated juveniles, women and their family members during a three-day symposium exploring the human rights issues associated with the criminal justice system.

The symposium, “An Act of Justice: Undoing the Legacy of Mass Incarceration,” is co-sponsored by the Rothko Chapel and the University of St. Thomas. Sessions will be held March 30 – April 1 on both campuses.

The conference will offer workshops, panels and keynote addresses featuring academics, activists, religious leaders, artists, criminal justice reform experts, and formerly incarcerated individuals and their families.

“This symposium comes at a critical time in our history when policymakers are examining the crisis of mass incarceration,” said Thompson, Alumnae College Professor of Law and director of the Criminal Justice Institute at the Law Center. “How did we become a nation that imprisons more people — by far — than any in the civilized world?

“More importantly, what can we do to change course while keeping our communities safe? The speakers at this symposium will offer insights and personal stories representing many disciplines and perspectives.”

Thompson will speak about the unique circumstances faced by women and young offenders behind bars as well as how their family members are affected. Her discussion will be 1:45-3 p.m., Friday, March 31, in the Jerabeck Center 2nd Floor, Scanlan Room on the UST campus.

“As someone with a family member who has been affected by the experience of going to jail, I can offer some lessons about the current pretrial justice system and its effects on the most vulnerable,” she said.

Thompson will discuss bail reform efforts currently before the state legislature as part of a broader panel discussion on public policy from 12:30-2 p.m., Saturday, April 1, also in the Scanlan Room at UST.

“The time has come to modernize our system of setting bail,” Thompson said. “A major lawsuit in Harris County, as well as legislation pending before the Texas Legislature, may bring needed reforms.”

Nicole Casarez, a visiting professor at the UH Law Center as well as an attorney and communication professor at UST, will serve on a panel, “From Arrest to Community Reintegration,” dealing with the process of arrest, incarceration and reentry through the perspective of experts working in the field. The discussion will be 10:45-12 p.m., Friday, in the Rothko Chapel.

Keynote speakers are Professor Margaret Burnham of Northeastern University Law School and Vincent Schiraldi, senior research fellow at Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University.

The symposium will include a virtual reality experience that places viewers inside a U.S. solitary confinement prison cell presented by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

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