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For Immediate Release

Locke Lord Honored with the 2014 Beacon of Justice Award from the National Legal Aid & Defender Association

(DALLAS) May 21, 2014 – Locke Lord has been honored by the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) with the 2014 Beacon of Justice Award, in recognition of work that led to the passage of the Michael Morton Act in Texas – a landmark reform of the state’s criminal justice system.

NLADA is America's oldest and largest nonprofit devoted to ensuring delivery of legal services to those who cannot afford counsel. The Beacon of Justice Award recognizes law firms that have devoted significant time and resources to creating innovative strategies to improve life outcomes for low income individuals.

In 2012, a team of nearly 40 Locke Lord lawyers worked with the nonprofits Texas Appleseed and the Texas Defender Service to interview prosecutors across Texas and analyze their criminal discovery practices. The research uncovered systemic inconsistencies from county to county regarding what information was provided to defendants during discovery. In some cases, the withholding of information led to wrongful convictions.

Compelled in large part by Locke Lord’s research, in May 2013 Texas Gov. Rick Perry signed the Michael Morton Act, a state law requiring prosecutors turn over all evidence to defense attorneys in criminal cases. The law was named after Michael Morton, a man who was incarcerated nearly 25 years after being wrongly convicted of killing his wife. In the original case, the prosecutor was found to have withheld critical evidence that would have identified the real killer.

The Firm’s commitment to the cause continues to this day. Currently, a team of Locke Lord lawyers is engaged in researching the implementation of the Michael Morton Act to ensure that it is being fairly applied to all defendants, across all jurisdictions in the state.

“This is a great honor to be recognized for the significant work that led to the Michael Morton Act,” said Dallas Partner **[Elizabeth Mack](#)**, who has served since 2007 on the board of Texas Appleseed, a nonprofit that partners with law firms to develop policy solutions to major legal issues affecting disadvantaged members of society. “The Firm has dedicated hundreds of pro bono hours to research in this project and for that to result in a real, substantive change to the criminal justice system in the state is incredibly satisfying.”

The Beacon of Justice Award will be formally presented at the NLADA Exemplar Award Dinner on June 26 in Washington, D.C. For Locke Lord’s considerable efforts in effecting this major



change in Texas' judicial process, the Firm also was awarded the 2013 Pro Bono Leadership Award by Texas Appleseed.

Locke Lord consistently ranks among *American Lawyer's* top 100 U.S. law firms. The Firm's full range of practice and industry areas serve national and international clients from offices in Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Hong Kong, Houston, London, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Sacramento, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. It has an excellent reputation in complex litigation, regulatory and transactional work, with its 650-plus lawyers building collaborative relationships and crafting creative solutions – all designed and executed to meet clients' long-term strategic goals.

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