



## Press Release

For immediate release: Friday, July 21, 2017

### **Gideon's Promise and the SCLC Partner for this Generation's Civil Rights Movement**

[ATLANTA, July 21, 2017] - On July 20, 2017, Gideon's Promise President, Jonathan Rapping, and Executive Director, Ilham Askia joined Dr. Charles Steele, President of the National Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to announce a partnership between the two organizations during Dr. Steele's Presidential Address at SCLC's 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Memphis, TN.

Through this partnership, the two organizations will 1) provide training and support for public defenders in our nation's most challenging justice systems, 2) raise awareness of the critical role public defenders must play in a broader strategy to transform criminal justice in America, and 3) build strong partnerships between public defenders and the communities they serve.

#### **Reflections on this partnership:**

Our struggle for civil and human rights is far from finished. Nowhere is this truer than in our criminal justice system. It is a system that is almost exclusively reserved for the poor and disproportionately for black and brown people. We do not see them as worthy of dignity and respect. Public defenders serve as the advocates for these men, women, and children. If they do not have support, they cannot help our most vulnerable communities fight back against this unjust system. We are excited to join Gideon's Promise in its effort to build a movement of advocates to interrupt the status quo. They are doing important civil rights work. That is what we have been doing for over 60 years. The fit is natural.

***Dr. Charles Steele Jr., President/CEO, Southern Christian Leadership Conference***

As the child of an incarcerated father, I am personally aware of the devastation visited upon children and families when a parent is locked up. I come from a community where most men have been caught up in the criminal justice system." No one seemed to speak for, or

care about, them. As a child I learned that the lives in my community were not valued. Our approach to criminal justice teaches that lesson to millions of children across America every year.

***Ilham Askia, Executive Director, Gideon's Promise***

When I learned about the work of Gideon's Promise, it was instantly obvious to me that public defenders had a central role to play in our effort to make America just. As a community activist I understand that public defenders are the key to giving voice to those in the criminal justice system and challenging our misguided assumptions about their humanity. But because public defenders are so overwhelmed and beaten down, these communities often see them as part of the problem. Through this partnership we will redefine the relationship between public defenders and the people they serve.

***Dr. Benjamin Williams, President, Cobb County (Georgia) Chapter of SCLC***

Public defenders are almost completely overlooked in our national conversation about criminal justice reform. This omission is fatal to a comprehensive strategy to have equal justice. We are grateful to Dr. Steele for recognizing the critical role public defenders must play in this important civil rights struggle and for inviting us to partner with SCLC to transform criminal justice in America. We are truly honored that the organization of Dr. King is taking the lead in recognizing the need to support public defenders and the importance of the movement we are building through Gideon's Promise. This partnership is a game-changer.

***Jonathan Rapping, President, Gideon's Promise***

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Notes to editor:

- The very beginnings of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference can be traced back to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Click Here for the history of the SCLC: <http://nationalsclc.org/about-us/history/>
  - Please contact Gideon's Promise for interviews or images.
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