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Announcing ...

NEW TRIAL FOR ALABAMA DEATH ROW INMATE REPRESENTED BY SNELL & WILMER LAWYER

Years-Long Pro Bono Legal Fight Leads to Rare Outcome Before Alabama Supreme Court

LOS ANGELES (January 16, 2019) – The Alabama Supreme Court ordered a new trial in the case of death row inmate Emanuel Gissendanner, who was represented by Snell & Wilmer partner Becca Wahlquist. This order is a significant turn of events for Snell & Wilmer's pro bono client who has been on death row for more than 15 years.

Wahlquist, a litigator in the firm's Los Angeles office, has represented Gissendanner over 11 years, since June 2007, challenging the constitutionality of his original capital murder trial. In March 2010, the Alabama trial court judge who had overseen the 2003 trial found that the trial had not been a fair one, and that the outcome would have been different but for the constitutionally inadequate representation both by the court-appointed defense team and by the State's withholding of evidence favorable to the defense. While the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, in a 3-2 decision, reversed that ruling in a 2014 order, on January 4, 2019, the Alabama Supreme Court ordered that the original trial court's order for a new trial be reinstated.



Becca Wahlquist

"I'm elated to know that the Alabama Supreme Court agrees that my client's constitutional rights were violated during his original trial 18 years ago when his attorneys failed to investigate his defense," said Wahlquist. "As the trial court that oversaw the original trial found, my client likely would not have been convicted, let alone sentenced to death, had a reasonable investigation been conducted by his criminal defense counsel. I'm also grateful for the support that Snell & Wilmer has provided me since I arrived at the firm more than four years ago. This result would not have been possible without the help of numerous colleagues and the firm's leadership."

Wahlquist had argued that her client should receive a new trial based on ineffective assistance of his original counsel and Brady violations. The Alabama Supreme Court, before whom Wahlquist argued in April 2018, reached only the ineffective assistance of counsel claims before ordering a new trial by a 6-2 vote.

Wahlquist, who started representing Gissendanner while working at Kirkland & Ellis, is Gissendanner's lead counsel. Kirkland & Ellis partner Michael Baumann has also provided invaluable assistance throughout the past 11 years, as has the Alabama-based Equal Justice Initiative.

About Snell & Wilmer

Founded in 1938, Snell & Wilmer is a full-service business law firm with more than 425 attorneys practicing in 12 locations throughout the United States and in Mexico, including Los Angeles and Orange County, California; Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona; Denver, Colorado; Washington, D.C.; Boise, Idaho; Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Los Cabos, Mexico. The firm represents clients ranging from large, publicly traded corporations to small businesses, individuals and entrepreneurs. For more information, visit www.swlaw.com.