

Contact: Toni Valenti  
212.267.6646 x 210  
tvalenti@nycla.org

**NEW YORK COUNTY LAWYERS ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
APPROVES JUSTICE CENTER REPORT ON THE PROBLEM OF INNOCENT  
PEOPLE PLEADING GUILTY**

*UPCOMING PUBLIC FORUM ON DEC 2, 2019 WITH KEYNOTE RODNEY ROBERTS*

**New York, NY – November 13, 2019** – The Justice Center of the New York County Lawyer’s Association (“NYCLA”) issued a forward-thinking report tackling the problem of innocent people pleading guilty in October 2019, which was approved by the NYCLA Board of Directors at its October 15, 2019 meeting.

Last year, the Justice Center—spurred by the Hon. Jed S. Rakoff’s scholarship that between 2 and 8 percent of defendants who plead guilty are actually innocent—commissioned a Task Force to investigate this problem and propose practical solutions. In formulating solutions to the problem of innocent people pleading guilty, the Task Force’s Report considered a number of institutional pressures that weigh on defendants to plead guilty such as disproportionate disparities between pled-to and post-trial sentences, and a lack of access to information about the criminal justice system. The Report proposes a number of specific and practical recommendations, including reducing the number of unnecessary court appearances, providing defendants with access to information about the criminal justice system, affording more opportunities for communication with defense counsel, and

giving judges more discretion when sentencing. Stephen C. Lessard, NYCLA's President said, "I want to commend the seventy members of the Task Force for this thoughtful and practical report which complements and builds on recent legislative reforms. NYCLA looks forward to working with other bar associations, the courts, prosecutors and community leaders to implement these recommendations. They will add fairness to the plea bargaining process and save many innocent New Yorkers from pleading guilty and suffering enormous consequences for crimes they did not commit."

On December 2, 2019, at 6:00 PM, the Justice Center will be holding a public forum at NYCLA (14 Vesey St. New York, NY 10007) to present the findings of the Task Force's Report and discuss an action plan for its implementation. The forum will include a keynote address by Rodney Roberts, who pleaded guilty to a crime that he did not commit and spent seventeen years in custody before being exonerated with assistance by the Innocence Project. The forum will also include remarks by Prof. Elayne Greenberg (St. John's Law School), James B. Kobak, Jr. (Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP; Chair, NYCLA Justice Center), Hon. Joseph Kevin McKay (Ret.) (Vice-Chair, NYCLA Justice Center), and Lewis Tesser (Tesser, Ryan & Rochman, LLP; Program Chair). Attendees of the program will be eligible for 2 NY and NJ MCLE credits. More information for the event can be found at [www.nycla.org](http://www.nycla.org).

The Report was prepared by NYCLA's Task Force on Solving the Problem of Innocent People Pleading Guilty, which was created by the Justice Center in 2018 and co-chaired by Lewis Tesser and Charles Kerr. The mission of NYCLA's Justice Center is to partner with leaders of the legal and non-legal communities to identify and understand social justice issues, promote access to justice and act as a catalyst for meaningful improvement in the administration of justice in New York State. The Task Force included a holistic panel of actors in the criminal justice system, including defense lawyers, prosecutors, retired judges, and academics. The Report can be accessed [here](#).

## About the New York County Lawyers Association

The New York County Lawyers Association ([www.nycla.org](http://www.nycla.org)) was founded in 1908 as one of the first major bar associations in the country that admitted members without regard to race, ethnicity, religion or gender. Since its inception, it has pioneered some of the most far-reaching and tangible reforms in American jurisprudence. For more information on NYCLA please visit [nycla.org](http://nycla.org)

# # #