



Senior Supervising Attorney, Criminal Justice Reform

Jackson, Mississippi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a leader in the fight against hate and bigotry in the United States, is seeking nominations and applications for a new Senior Supervising Attorney (SSA) in the significantly expanding Criminal Justice Reform practice group. Joining a legal team that uses impact litigation and policy advocacy as its primary tools for pursuing justice and equal rights, the Senior Supervising Attorney will lead the implementation of SPLC's criminal justice reform agenda in Mississippi, and manage a highly-talented team in using all possible tools – including litigation, legislative campaigns, and public advocacy – to advance the rights of all.

As fear, political and cultural division, hatred, and economic uncertainty persist in the American consciousness, and manifest in discriminatory policies, speech, and actions, individuals across the country are reigniting their commitment to equal justice. Southern Poverty Law Center's Legal Department is growing in response to the increased demand to protect Americans whose civil rights are being threatened in cities and states across the country. Over the last 12 months, the growth of this team has been unprecedented. Under the guidance of Deputy Legal Director Lisa Graybill, the Criminal Justice Reform practice group is growing to meet the goal of delivering systemic reforms. Not only is Mississippi among the top ten states nationally in its rate of incarceration, its history of systemic racism resonates in every aspect of the criminal justice system, from over-policing, to draconian sentencing policies, to horrific conditions of confinement, to collateral consequences that ensure that even when people leave prison, they are not free.

The new Senior Supervising Attorney will report to the Deputy Legal Director, Lisa Graybill and collaboratively develop the vision and strategy for criminal justice reform in the state. Together with a team of litigators, policy counsels, advocates, and support staff, the SSA will use every tool at his/her/their disposal to challenge the structural racism that has infected the criminal justice system in the state, and continues to result in mass incarceration and the disproportionate incarceration of Black men, Black women, other people of color and those living in poverty. Specifically, the SSA will be responsible for developing and litigating impact cases raising constitutional and statutory claims in Mississippi and federal courts, at both trial and appellate levels. The SSA will engage in litigation and public advocacy of civil rights issues relating to practices in policing, prosecution, sentencing, incarceration, and probation/parole. This may include, but will not be limited to, advancing sentencing reform and addressing unconstitutional conditions in Mississippi's juvenile, adult, and immigrant detention facilities. The SSA will lead the team in addressing other issues such as: the denial of due process in the criminal justice system; racial disparities; collateral consequences of justice system involvement; the provision of indigent defense; and over-policing or police misconduct.

The ideal candidate will be an exceptionally talented litigator, strategist, and manager with an interest in civil rights litigation, and for equity and constitutional compliance at every stage of the criminal justice system. He/she/they will bring at least seven (7) years of litigation experience and two (2) years successfully managing and leading a highly-talented team and be barred in, eligible to waive in, or willing to sit for the next bar exam in Mississippi.

This search is being conducted by Tamar Datan and Hallie Dietsch of [NPAG](#). Please find application instructions at the end of this document.



HISTORY AND MISSION

Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in 1971 to secure the promises of the Civil Rights movement through impact litigation. While landmark court decisions of the 1950s and 1960s had set precedents to usher in widespread racial equality, states and local jurisdictions were reluctant to implement changes to ensure all people had equal access to public resources and equal protection under the law. Instead, vulnerable communities, especially Blacks in the South, faced discrimination in the workforce, in schools, in state legislatures, the criminal justice system, and hate-driven terror in their communities. Early staff at SPLC were committed to pro bono litigation, taking on cases that few were willing to pursue, and aggressively pushing for decisions that would have widespread implications.

In 1971, civil rights activist Julian Bond was named as SPLC's first president and the organization began to campaign for and win national financial support. As SPLC grew and expanded, it restructured its work to focus on four crucial areas of programming in the fight for justice. These include:

- **The Intelligence Project**, (formerly known as KlanWatch) a team dedicated to monitoring, infiltrating, reporting, and shutting down the activity of domestic hate groups.
- **Teaching Tolerance**, which combats prejudice among our nation's youth while promoting equality, inclusiveness and equitable learning environments in the classroom.
- **Civil Rights Memorial Center**, located across the street from SPLC and near other historic sites, features the names and stories of martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement, a theater, classrooms, and the Wall of Tolerance.
- **The Legal Department** continues to seek justice and advocate for the rights of all people, just as Morris Dees and Joe Levin did at SPLC's founding.

With critical wins over the years against discriminatory practices by individuals, the private sector, and local, state and federal government entities and actors, SPLC's legal team has inspired hope and brought justice to vulnerable individuals and marginalized communities throughout the South. Landmark cases against the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation significantly bankrupted elements of those groups and the Intelligence Project's sophisticated tracking of these groups continues to support the ongoing work of the legal team.

The Criminal Justice Reform practice area is one of five related but unique practice groups, which also include Economic Justice, Immigrant Justice, LGBT Rights and Special Litigation, and Children's Rights. More information about these practice areas and SPLC's other programs can be found at: <https://www.splcenter.org/>.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AT SPLC

Over the past four decades, the US incarceration rate has more than quadrupled and is now unprecedented in world history. Roughly 2.2 million people are behind bars in the United States, an increase of 1.9 million since 1972. The US has the world's largest prison population, with one-quarter of its prisoners but just 5 percent of global population. On any given day, some seven million people, or about one in every 31 people, are under the supervision of the corrections system, either locked up or on probation or parole. This vast expansion of the corrections system, which has been called "the New Jim Crow", is the direct result of a failed, decades-long drug war and a "law and order" movement that began as a reaction to the urban unrest of the late 1960s, just after the Civil Rights era. It's a system marred by vast racial disparities that stigmatizes and targets young black men for arrest at a young age, unfairly targets communities of color, burdens taxpayers, and exacts a tremendous social cost. The Mississippi team uses litigation and advocacy to dismantle the tradition of using the criminal justice system to subjugate and disenfranchise Black, Brown and poor residents. Below are two examples:

**Re-enfranchisement: Dennis Hopkins, et al. v. Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann (now Harkness v. Hosemann)**

More than a century ago, Mississippi adopted a state constitution that was specifically intended to prevent freed slaves and their descendants from gaining political influence, in part by blocking their access to the ballot box. Today, a provision of that 1890 constitution – a lifetime voting ban for anyone convicted of certain crimes – is still having its intended effect: Between 1994 and 2017, nearly 50,000 Mississippians were banned for life from voting due to conviction of a disqualifying offense.

An ongoing SPLC suit includes claims that the lifetime voting ban violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment; the First Amendment's right to political expression and association; and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment on the grounds that it arbitrarily grants or deprives citizens of the right to vote and that it was intended to discriminate on the basis of race.

Prison Reform: Jermaine Dockery et al. v. Christopher Epps, Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections

In March of this year, SPLC conducted a five-week trial to stop the mistreatment of people in a for-profit Mississippi prison where mentally ill individuals, who are at risk of death and loss of limbs, have resorted to setting their cells on fire to receive medical attention. The federal [lawsuit](#) that prompted the trial in Jackson describes how prison officials have known of the dangerous conditions at the East Mississippi Correctional Facility (EMCF) for years, but failed to protect the health and safety of people who are incarcerated there. The prison houses nearly 1,300 seriously mentally ill people.

The class-action lawsuit was filed by the SPLC in 2013 with the American Civil Liberties Union, the Law Office of Elizabeth Alexander, and Covington & Burling LLP. The lawsuit details life in an intensely violent prison where cells frequently lack working lights or functioning toilets, creating dungeon-like conditions.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate will be an exceptionally intelligent and effective litigator, strategist, and manager with an unrelenting commitment to justice on behalf of vulnerable individuals. While no one candidate will have all the qualifications enumerated below, the ideal candidate will be a licensed, trained attorney and have the following skills, qualifications, and abilities:

- A sincere commitment to social justice, and a keen awareness of the indelible relationship between impact litigation, policy advocacy, and social change;
- Exceptional litigation skills and at least seven (7) years of federal court civil litigation or comparable legal experience;
- At least two (2) years of demonstrated success inspiring and leading highly talented and diverse teams, preferably of legal staff; proven success hiring, training, conducting performance evaluations, and mentoring teams;
- Initiative, vision, creativity, and a demonstrated willingness to take calculated risks in crafting and executing strategies; the absolute drive to succeed and the understanding and personal commitment to going above and beyond in service to mission and success;
- A deep personal commitment to diversity and inclusion; proven success engaging with diverse communities; lived experience that informs an authentic understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable communities, and a sophisticated understanding of the historical nature of structural power differences with a lens into how that impacts social justice efforts today;
- Demonstrated knowledge of at least two of the following areas is a plus: advancing sentencing reform; addressing unconstitutional conditions in juvenile, adult, and immigrant detention facilities; the denial of due process in the



criminal justice system; racial disparities; collateral consequences of justice system involvement; the provision of indigent defense; and over-policing or police misconduct;

- The ability to lead and direct policy campaigns around criminal justice reform in Mississippi.
- Experience applying highly analytical skills to public policy issues, including an ability to synthesize and summarize large amounts of information, and to focus quickly on the essence of an issue;
- Excellent communication skills, including research and writing, interpersonal and public communication skills, and an ability to translate vision and strategy into external messaging;
- Excellent interpersonal skills, including maturity, keen judgment, the ability to facilitate challenging conversations and quickly read interpersonal dynamics, and the ability to work across projects with people from a wide array of backgrounds and perspectives;
- Ability to create a positive atmosphere in a high-energy, fast-paced work environment; excellent and consistent attention to detail, and the ability to prioritize and meet deadlines;
- A natural intellectual curiosity and personal drive for self-reflection, improvement, and learning;
- Patience, a sense of humor, gravitas, and a high tolerance for ambiguity; the ability to adapt quickly to change; an optimistic outlook, a natural orientation towards collaboration with the self-confidence to move forward in areas of uncertainty or where there is not necessarily agreement;
- The ability and willingness to travel regionally;
- Spanish or other language skills relevant to the Southeast are desired;
- Justice system-involved candidates are preferred; and,
- Admission to the Mississippi Bar or willingness to sit for the next Bar Exam is required.

TO APPLY

This search is being conducted with assistance from Tamar Datan and Hallie Dietsch of Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group. Candidates are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, and applications will be reviewed as they are received. Please send nominations and/or applications including cover letter describing your interest and qualifications, your resume (in Word format), and where you learned of the position to: SPLC-SSAMS@nonprofitprofessionals.com.

Southern Poverty Law Center is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Candidates of all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

NPAG is a national executive search and consulting firm dedicated to serving the mission-driven community. We partner with global mission-driven clients to deliver highly-tailored, innovative, and strategic senior- and executive-level search services.

www.nonprofitprofessionals.com.