

Press Releases

ABA Honors VerGow With John Paul Stevens Guiding Hand of Counsel Award

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WASHINGTON, DC—June 18—O'Melveny partner Meaghan VerGow was recognized with the American Bar Association Death Penalty Representation Project's John Paul Stevens Guiding Hand of Counsel Award. In selecting VerGow for the honor, the organization cited her "exceptional commitment to providing high quality pro bono representation for indigent death row prisoners."

The award, to be presented at the Project's online 2020 Volunteer Recognition & Awards Program, honors individual attorneys who have "demonstrated the kind of courage and commitment associated with US Supreme Court Justice Stevens," the inaugural recipient of the award in 2011.

Described as a "champion of the powerless," Stevens authored many opinions expressing concerns about injustices in the administration of the death penalty, including racial bias, limitations on the courts' abilities to correct constitutional violations, and lack of access to competent counsel. Since his retirement, Stevens has continued to be an influential voice for the most vulnerable members of our society and for changes that will give meaning to our Constitutional protections.

VerGow's work has had a profound impact on both her clients and the law affecting other prisoners whose rights are under threat. Her most significant case culminated in a rare unanimous victory at the US Supreme Court in 2018, which fully accepted her argument on behalf of a capital inmate seeking financial assistance to reexamine issues in his defense that had been ignored by trial counsel.

"I am humbled to receive this honor from the ABA Death Penalty Representation Project, which has done so much to promote access to justice for capital defendants," VerGow said. "I am sincerely grateful for O'Melveny's support of these cases, and share this award with the firm and all the attorneys here who work so hard on behalf of our capital clients."

The Death Penalty Representation Project is the ABA's expert on issues related to the defense effort in death penalty cases. Since 1986, its singular focus has been to improve the quality and availability of legal representation for those facing possible death sentences.

O'Melveny's commitment to exceptional client service extends to the underrepresented members of society through the firm's vibrant and award-winning pro bono practice. The firm's pro bono program tackles the critical issues of the day, including immigration, housing, women's rights, foster care, education, veterans affairs, jail reform, and community building. Our clients—from military veterans to couples seeking marriage equality to nonprofits stitching together a social safety net—are as diverse as the communities we serve.

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