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Civil Rights Corps brings First Amendment suit against Galveston County judge, Launches Indigent Defense Initiative

WASHINGTON – This week **Civil Rights Corps** (CRC), on behalf of criminal-defense attorney **Andrew Willey**, sued Jack Ewing, Judge of the Galveston County Criminal Court, for violating Willey’s First Amendment rights. [According to the lawsuit](#), Ewing refused to allow Willey to continue to represent poor people charged with crimes because Willey vigorously advocates for his clients.

“Throughout the country, trial judges appoint the defense lawyers who appear before them,” said **Charlie Gerstein, a Civil Rights Corps attorney**. “This necessarily creates a conflict of interest: instead of fighting for the undivided interests of their clients, lawyers must also make sure they don’t inconvenience the judges who jail their clients. Motions go unfiled, and clients languish in jail in unprecedented numbers.”

According to the lawsuit, judges violate the Constitution when they punish lawyers for advocating on behalf of their clients. Willey alleges that he was removed from cases to which he was assigned, and passed over for future cases because he fought widespread, systemic constitutional violations in the Galveston Criminal Courts.

“Lawyers who represent indigent clients are intentionally silenced,” said **Willey, the plaintiff**. “Lawyers that cannot make arguments about pretrial release and investigation, cannot defend their clients. People that are denied the effective assistance of counsel they are guaranteed by the Constitution, feel pressured to plead guilty, often to wrongful charges, simply to return home because they can’t afford to pay money bail, even though the state has proven nothing.”

Willey seeks a declaratory judgment to protect him against further retaliation because of his advocacy on behalf of his clients. His lawsuit is pending in federal court in Galveston.

This lawsuit is the first step of CRC’s new Indigent Defense Initiative, which was launched to fight the persistent denial of the right to counsel across the country, specifically focusing on the problem of defense independence. Millions of legally innocent people every year cannot adequately defend themselves against criminal charges because their lawyers are overburdened, under resourced and plagued by systematic conflicts of interest. The [Indigent Defense Initiative](#) will challenge this entrenched unconstitutional system using groundbreaking litigation.

To read the full complaint filed in *Willey v. Ewing*, [click here](#).
For additional information on indigent defense issues, [click here](#).

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