

The Society of American Law Teachers—SALT—is proud to announce that the 2011 M. Shanara Gilbert Human Rights Award will be given to the Prison Law Office at SALT's Annual Dinner, Friday, January 7, 2011, at the Delancey Street Foundation, SF. Under the direction of executive director Don Specter, the Prison Law Office has passionately strived to improve the living conditions of California state prisoners and juvenile offenders through legal services.

The Prison Law Office, a small non-profit public interest law firm, recently won a major victory before a three-judge federal court, when, in January 2010, the court ordered the State of California to reduce the prison population by approximately 40,000 prisoners over two years. The order was the culmination of litigation arising out of two cases - *Plata v. Schwarzenegger* and *Coleman v. Schwarzenegger* - challenging inadequate medical and mental health care in the prisons. The court found that overcrowding was the primary cause of the constitutional violations in those cases, and that no relief other than reducing the prison population could remedy the violations. The United States Supreme Court has agreed to hear the State's appeal of this decision.

Prison Law Office Director Don Specter led the *Plata* trial team of Rebekah Evenson, Sara Norman, Steve Fama, and Alison Hardy. Specter and Evenson are handling the appeal for *Plata* before the United States Supreme Court. The law firm of Rosen Bien and Galvan, with partner Mike Bien in the lead, and Ernie Galvan, Jane Kahn, Maria Morris, Amy Whelan, Lisa Ells, Lori Rifkin, and Tom Nolan handled issues specific to the *Coleman* (mental health) case at the trial level. The *Coleman* lead counsel in the appeal to the United States Supreme Court is Paul Clement, with Mike Bien and his team from Rosen Bien, and the Prison Law Office, as co-counsel on the brief. The Prison Law Office was further aided by Fred Heather and Ed Sangster of K & L Gates, LLP, working as *pro bono* counsel at the trial.

For over 30 years, the Prison Law Office has been in the forefront of legal efforts to enforce the Constitution and other laws inside the walls of California's prisons. With a small staff of attorneys and support personnel, the Prison Law Office represents individual prisoners, engages in class action and other impact litigation, educates the public about prison conditions, and provides technical assistance to attorneys throughout the country.

California's prisons remain dangerously overcrowded at 180% of design capacity with over 165,000 prisoners crammed into 33 institutions, plus another 9,000 prisoners housed out-of-state and in community facilities. Basic necessities of life, such as medical and mental health care, are often lacking. Prisoners with disabilities are not recognized as disabled, and many are not provided reasonable accommodations as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Through both individual and impact litigation, the Prison Law Office has changed many California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation policies and practices, and has alleviated many of the cruel and unusual conditions that have been inflicted upon tens of thousands of state prisoners.