

News & Insights

Dykema Wins New Sentencing For Georgia Death Row Inmate

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DETROIT - The Georgia Supreme Court recently granted a new sentencing to death row inmate David Aaron Perkins based on ineffective counsel in his 1997 trial. Led by Patrick Hickey and Claire Harrison, a pro bono team of defense lawyers at national law firm Dykema has been representing Perkins in his appeals for more than a decade.

Perkins was convicted in Clayton County, Georgia for the 1995 murder of his neighbor, Herbert Ryals III, and was sentenced to death. The Georgia Supreme Court this month overturned that sentencing and sent the case back for a new penalty trial on the basis of an abundance of mitigation evidence Dykema lawyers uncovered which was not presented during the 1997 trial. The ruling detailed numerous accounts from relatives who said Perkins' father regularly beat him from the time he was a young child until early adulthood. The court said that even more powerful than the evidence of the abuse Perkins suffered as a youth was evidence showing how his behavior changed dramatically after he suffered two significant head injuries.

"When David was 18, he was in a car wreck that left him in a coma for five days. When he was 20, he was attacked by two men who punctured his skull and brain with the steel prongs of a rake. The Court has finally affirmed that if the evidence of these traumatic head injuries, coupled with a lifetime of physical abuse, were presented at trial, there is a reasonable probability the jury would not have sentenced Perkins to death. David's fight is not over but this is an important step and we will continue to pursue justice for him," said Dykema Litigation member Patrick Hickey.

Dykema's Longstanding Commitment to Pro Bono

Dykema believes the practice of law, especially in a large corporate firm, is a privilege that carries with it profound societal responsibilities. Performing legal services for those who cannot afford to pay for them or for organizations that benefit such persons is a central part of the firm's effort to improve the quality of life for the underserved in its community.

In 2010, Dykema attorneys and support staff performed approximately 10,000 hours of pro bono work. The firm and its attorneys have earned several prestigious awards for these efforts, including the American Bar Association Business Law Section's 2011 National Public Service Award, the 2009 Exceptional Service Award from the ABA Death Penalty Representation Project, the 2009 *John W. Cumminsky* Pro Bono Award, the 2009 Detroit Metropolitan Bar Pro Bono Service Award, and the 2010 Beacon of Justice Award from the National Legal Aid & Defender Association.

More information on Dykema's pro bono program is available at: probono.html.

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