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LEGAL SERVICES



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Equal Access to Justice

2018 Statewide Conference | Legal Service Providers of Arkansas
Criminalization of Poverty

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Leah Watson is Counsel in the Criminal Justice Project at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. She investigates and litigates suits challenging indigent incarceration.

Prior to joining the Lawyers’ Committee, Leah was a Senior Associate at Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP and an Associate at Baker Hostetler LLP. During that time, Leah gained litigation experience in civil and criminal matters. She led cross-border investigations in one of the top ten largest Foreign Corrupt Practices Act settlements. She was a member of the trial team that secured a victory in the largest residential mortgage backed securities trial in history. Additionally, Leah maintained a commitment to pro bono work. She obtained Special Immigrant Juvenile status and custody orders for pro bono clients and successfully challenged a pro bono client’s criminal conviction. During a six-month externship at the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights, Leah represented clients in disability rights, police misconduct, fair housing, and wage theft cases. Leah earned her J.D. from Harvard Law School in 2011.

Prior to law school, Leah taught high school in Atlanta, Georgia through Teach for America. She earned her B.A. magna cum laude in Communication Studies and Sociology from Vanderbilt University in 2006.

Session: The Criminalization of Poverty

The Criminalization of Poverty session will focus on criminal justice policies that create modern day debtors’ prisons throughout the United States and specifically in Arkansas. During the session, you will:

- Learn how people are incarcerated simply because they cannot afford to pay criminal justice debt, bail, or probation costs;

- Understand the Supreme Court and state jurisprudence governing indigent incarceration;
- Identify red flags that suggest a person has been incarcerated or is facing the threat of incarceration due to inability to pay;
- Recognize the ways that the criminalization of poverty leads to ACEs; and
- Appreciate the ways that you can challenge the criminalization of poverty as Legal Aid attorneys.

Pre-conference Materials: None.

Powerpoint Presentation: [Link to file here.](#)