

# APPELLATE DEFENDER COMMISSION

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## **Appellate Defender Commission Selects Valerie R. Newman for First “Thomas Award for Excellence in Appellate Advocacy”**

The Appellate Defender Commission (ADC) has selected Valerie R. Newman, Assistant Defender at the State Appellate Defender Office (SADO), for the first “Thomas Award for Excellence in Appellate Advocacy.” Named for SADO’s long-serving and much-respected Norris J. Thomas, Jr., the award will be given annually to a SADO attorney whose appellate advocacy achieves outstanding results for clients or the criminal justice system. Norris J. Thomas, Jr., served as SADO’s Deputy Director over two decades, before his untimely passing in 2007. His dedication to clients, and craft in achieving excellent outcomes, were legendary.

The choice of Ms. Newman was both unanimous and enthusiastic, as the ADC noted her excellent advocacy in *Laffler v Cooper*, \_\_\_ US \_\_\_ (2012). Responding to a grant of certiorari to the prosecution, Ms. Newman briefed and argued the case in the United States Supreme Court. On March 21, 2012, the Court ruled in her client’s favor, in a 5-4 decision. *Laffler* has been recognized as a watershed opinion, clarifying that the constitutional right to effective assistance of counsel includes guilty plea negotiations. The *Laffler* ruling, with that of a companion case, will have a “huge, immediate impact” on guilty plea cases according to CNN. Ms. Newman has represented hundreds of clients on appeal since her hiring as a SADO Assistant Defender over fifteen years ago, achieving excellent results for many.

Ms. Newman also is active in service to the profession, serving as co-chair of the State Bar of Michigan’s Criminal Issues Initiative and co-chair of task forces on recording of custodial interrogations and eyewitness identification issues. Her community service activities include the Culinary Challenge, an event that raises funds for several nonprofits serving girls, and the Ronald McDonald House of Detroit. She received the “2010 Community Role Model Award” from Alternatives for Girls, and the 2009 “Volunteer of the Year Award” from the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan Foundation.

The Appellate Defender Commission is a seven-member board statutorily charged with oversight of the appellate defense system, consisting of the State Appellate Defender Office and the Michigan Appellate Assigned Counsel System.