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Georgia Justice Project Honors Delta for Criminal Records Restriction Work

Delta Air Lines CLO Peter Carter received the nonprofit's annual Grassroots Justice Award at the Delta Flight Museum for his law department's work helping restrict criminal records that block Georgians from employment and housing.

By Meredith Hobbs | May 13, 2019

The Georgia Justice Project presented its annual Grass Roots Justice Award to Delta Air Lines chief legal officer Peter Carter and Delta's law department on Thursday evening for their help in restricting criminal records that block the nonprofit's clients from obtaining jobs, housing and education.

Georgia has the highest rate of criminal record-holders in the country, said the Georgia Justice Project's board chair, Dentons partner Dan Beale. He said 40% of Georgians have a criminal record, and 1 out of 18 Georgians is under correctional control.



Peter Carter, chief legal officer, Delta Air Lines. (Photo: John Disney/ALM)

New laws passed under former Gov. Nathan Deal's administration expanded eligibility for criminal records restriction to people with nonconvictions and first offenders, even though Georgia still has some of the most strict laws (<https://www.gjp.org/programs/criminal-records/>) in the country.

Last year, Delta's law department made its pro bono focus the Georgia Justice Project's Criminal Records Clinic, which Beale called the group's fastest-growing initiative.

When members of the legal department proposed Georgia Justice Project for their pro bono focus, "I was so thrilled," said Carter, the Delta chief legal officer.

"Equal justice under the law is one of the bedrock principles of our nation," he said, adding that the Georgia Justice Project's work contributes to that.

Debbie Brown, a Delta assistant general counsel, said that she was surprised to find out during training how strict Georgia's criminal records laws are, and she learned quickly how high-stakes the work is for Georgia Justice Project clients.

"A criminal record follows them everywhere—when they apply for jobs, housing and benefits," Brown said. One client she helped, she said, turned to Georgia Justice Project after a two-decade-old misdemeanor record resurfaced during a job search.

The woman had worked in a clothing store in her early 20s when some of her friends came in and stole \$50 worth of clothing. The woman did not try to stop them, Brown said, and the company pressed charges against her for theft by deception, resulting in one year of probation, a \$300 fine and \$50.68 in restitution.

The client went on to a successful 22-year career at AT&T and raised a family. Then she was laid off and applied to become an Uber driver. Uber denied her application after unearthing the old charge.

Brown said her client's court petition to have her record restricted and sealed was granted, clearing the path for her to find employment. "There are thousands like her, though, whose misdemeanor criminal record continues to haunt them," she said.

"This was the most rewarding volunteer legal case I've ever done," Brown added, in her 30-year career in the Delta legal department.

Carter, Delta's chief legal officer, accepted (<https://www.gjp.org/news/gjp-honors-delta-at-2019-grass-roots-justice-awards/>) the Georgia Justice Project award at a benefit for the group held at the Delta Flight Museum in Atlanta, surrounded by a jumbo jet and earlier plane models now on display in a repurposed hangar.

The Georgia Justice Project was founded in 1986 with the unique mission of providing legal and social services, plus employment support, to indigent people who've been accused of a crime or are returning from jail or prison.

The group has grown from four lawyers to a 26-person staff that includes social workers who offer counseling, job training and referrals, thanks to the Woodruff Foundation and support from a plethora of law firms and corporate legal departments like Delta's.

Other big supporters include: Alston & Bird, Georgia-Pacific, The Home Depot, King & Spalding, Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore, Dentons and Eversheds Sutherland.

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