

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UH Law Center to host symposium and lecture on state of forensic science

Why do judges still admit “junk science” as evidence in criminal trials and is justice better served today after calls for reform?

Sept. 5, 2019 — The University of Houston Law Center will host a symposium Sept. 20 on the future of crime labs and forensic science to commemorate the 10th anniversary of a landmark report by the National Academy of Science that questioned the validity of certain standard forensic practices and urged major reforms.

On Sept. 19, the Hon. Jed S. Rakoff, U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York, will speak on “bad forensic science” as part of the Justice Ruby Kless Sondock Jurist-in-Residence Lecture series.

The symposium, featuring presentations and discussions with 12 criminal justice scholars and attorneys, is sponsored by the Law Center’s Criminal Justice Institute and the Houston Law Review.

“The symposium will bring together national experts to discuss forensic science evidence and the reforms implemented to prevent wrongful convictions,” said Law Center Professor Sandra Guerra Thompson, Newell H. Blakely Professor in Law and director of the Criminal Justice Institute. “We mark the anniversary of the National Academy of Science’s report because of the fundamental issues it brought to light.

“Central to every criminal trial is some sort of forensic evidence, so it is critical that this evidence is the result of sound scientific practices,” added Thompson, a founding member and current vice-chair of the Houston Forensic Science Center board of directors. “Every judge and every lawyer has come to understand that the legal profession must ensure the integrity of the forensic evidence used to secure convictions.”

Judge Rakoff’s keynote address the afternoon before the symposium is titled: “Why Judges Admit Bad Forensic Science — And What Can Be Done About It.” He contends that such questionable evidence as bite-mark and hair comparisons, arson analyses and similar findings have been admitted in more than 40% of cases in which innocent people have been wrongly convicted. His lecture will explore the weaknesses of such “bad” evidence, why courts continue to admit it and what needs to be done to end the practice.

The lecture is from 4:30 – 5:30 p.m., Sept. 19, in Room 109 BLB at the University of Houston Law Center, 4604 Calhoun Road. Attendees earn 1 hour of CLE ethics credit. Click [here](#) for more information and to register for the lecture.

The symposium will be from 8 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., Sept. 20, The morning session will be held in Room 109 BLB and the afternoon session in the Hendricks Heritage Room at the UH Law Center. Attendees earn 3.75 hours of CLE credit. Click [here](#) for more information and to register for the symposium.

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About the University of Houston

The [University of Houston](#) is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter for excellence in undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city and one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the country, UH is a federally designated Hispanic- and Asian-American-Serving institution with enrollment of more than 46,000 students.

About the University of Houston Law Center

The [University of Houston Law Center](#) (UHLC) is a dynamic, top tier law school located in the nation's 4th largest city. UHLC's Health Law, Intellectual Property Law, and Part-time programs rank in the U.S. News Top 10. It awards Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and Master of Laws (LL.M.) degrees, through its academic branch, the College of Law. The Law Center is more than just a law school. It is a powerful hub of intellectual activity with more than 11 centers and institutes which fuel its educational mission and national reputation. UHLC is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools.