JOB OPENING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TEXAS FAIR DEFENSE PROJECT

The Texas Fair Defense Project (TFDP) seeks a dynamic and entrepreneurial executive director to provide strategic leadership for the organization. This position is a remarkable opportunity for an experienced, creative leader to build on TFDP’s strengths and successes to increase our impact. Since 2006, TFDP has worked in the courts, the Texas Legislature, and local jurisdictions to improve procedural justice in the state’s criminal courts, as well as justice system outcomes for economically oppressed people accused of criminal offenses.

About the Texas Fair Defense Project

TFDP is a nonprofit organization based in Austin, Texas that works to improve the fairness of Texas’s criminal courts and ensure that all Texans have access to justice. TFDP’s mission is to fight to end the criminalization of poverty in Texas. We envision a system of justice that upholds the dignity and civil rights of all people, regardless of income, race, or gender.

Through litigation, policy advocacy, and community lawyering, we aim to disentangle people and communities from the criminal legal system and hold system actors accountable. As an anti-racist organization, we recognize the criminal legal system systematically targets Black people and other people of color, causing irreparable and intergenerational harm. We are committed to assisting and empowering impacted people and communities, working side by side to dismantle the current system so healthy communities can take hold in its place.

TFDP’s model is unique: working directly with clients and our client community—those who cannot afford to pay for a lawyer but are entangled in the criminal legal system—we identify areas in the criminal legal system where people do not have a recognized constitutional right to counsel and work to fill that gap with limited legal services. We then use what we learn through this work to push for greater systemic change by engaging in client-driven advocacy, writing policy reports, filing strategic litigation, and supporting movement-building. Our work is responsive and collaborative, and our deep community relationships are central to our effectiveness and sustainability.

Our approach has generated many legal and policy victories, benefitting millions of Texans. In the past few years, we worked with clients and partners to end the “Driver Responsibility Program,” lifting more than a million driver’s license suspensions and over $2 billion in surcharge debt. We also helped Travis County secure $20 million to start its first adult public defender office in 2020, fixing a gap in access to legal services. Working with community partners, we enabled Travis County Commissioners to reject plans for building a new $80 million women’s jail and to invest instead in community-based resources and support. In 2017, we advocated for and won a historic fines and fees omnibus bill, SB 1913 (Zaffirini), which paved a path to help Texans resolve traffic tickets by expanding service and waiver options, limiting incarceration for nonpayment, and removing barriers to driver’s licenses and vehicle registration; we’ve been building
from that foundational victory with every successive legislative session. Our work has even led to wins in the Fifth Circuit and at the Supreme Court.

**Major Duties and Responsibilities**

The Executive Director will provide strategic leadership for our programs and secure resources to strengthen our work. The Executive Director will be responsible for the overall management and operations of the organization, and work closely with TFDP’s Board of Directors and staff.

Key responsibilities include:

- Lead TFDP’s successful programs to increase access to justice and improve the fairness of the criminal justice system, develop creative advocacy strategies to advance our mission, and coordinate organizational advocacy efforts across programs and departments.
- Strengthen relationships with current institutional and individual donors, and expand TFDP’s base of financial support in order to provide a solid foundation for our programs.
- Manage and support TFDP’s growing group of committed, hard-working staff;
- Collaborate with staff and the Board of Directors to develop and support new programs and engage in long-term planning for the organization.
- Set annual organizational goals and monitor performance toward achieving goals, while enhancing opportunities for personal and professional leadership development.
- Develop a strategy to increase the visibility and impact of our work, and be a compelling spokesperson for the organization in public forums, meetings, and the media.
- Develop and manage a diverse set of relationships, including with staff, Board, funders, the media, the courts, government agencies, elected and other state and local officials, pro bono partners, community and advocacy organizations, and client communities.
- Ensure compliance with grant agreements, contracts, and other ethical and legal requirements.

**Qualifications**

The ideal candidate will have a deep passion for TFDP’s mission and core values; a demonstrated commitment to social justice and civil rights; a track record of fruitful fundraising from institutional and individual supporters; a track record of addressing management, personnel, and programmatic issues from an equity lens; a commitment to taking the lead from the communities TDFP serves; a commitment to raising one’s cultural consciousness and challenging oppressive practices on an interpersonal and institutional level; experience with successful advocacy campaigns, program development, and project management; vision and creativity in pursuing new opportunities for our organization; the ability to sustain and develop a broad set of relationships; strong leadership skills; the ability to effectively and respectfully communicate, collaborate, and connect with colleagues, external partners, and people of various backgrounds, identities, and experiences; the ability to receive constructive feedback, demonstrate introspection, and shift behavior accordingly; energy and enthusiasm; and business acumen.

TFDP has an office in Austin, Texas and currently has several staff members working remotely from cities around Texas. Although the organization is open to a hybrid working environment for the incoming ED, it
will be important for the ED to be regularly physically present at the TFDP offices to engage with staff, partner organizations, and funders. Candidates should be prepared to discuss their proposed goals for virtual and in-person work.

The preferred candidate will demonstrate at least five years of relevant work experience, including proven skill at resource development and fundraising, program management, and grant administration. A license to practice law is not required, although familiarity with the criminal courts system in Texas is a plus.

This is an exciting time to join TFDP as the organization continues to grow.

**Salary and Benefits**

Salary begins at $100,000 annually, commensurate with experience, and a generous benefits package is provided. We offer paid health insurance, unlimited leave, and a 401(k). TFDP also supports professional development with a meaningful budget for staff development.

**To Apply**

Please send a detailed cover letter, resume, writing sample demonstrating recent policy, advocacy, litigation, or fundraising work (5-10 pages total preferred, which can be a portfolio of shorter pieces), and a list of three references to Board President Allison Hartry at ahartry@themoralesfirm.com with the subject line “TFDP Executive Director Position.” Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Additional information about TFDP’s programs and accomplishments is available at www.fairdefense.org.