



Peter McGraw

**Texas RioGrande
Legal Aid
Corpus Christi, TX**

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**Greenberg Traurig,
LLP**

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**Texas Access to
Justice Foundation**

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FELLOWSHIP SUMMARY

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Peter assisted individuals with psychiatric disabilities to remedy the civil collateral consequences of their involvement in the criminal justice system.

NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

The mental health system in Texas is severely under-resourced. People with serious mental illness are nearly eight times more likely to end up in state jails than in state psychiatric hospitals. As a result, people with serious mental illness are drastically overrepresented in Texas's criminal justice system. The consequences of criminal justice involvement go far beyond the criminal case. An arrest can lead to eviction, loss of employment, and termination of public benefits. These civil collateral consequences are especially traumatic for people who receive community-based services and supports. People with mental health conditions deserve civil representation in addition to traditional criminal defense services to remedy the impact of these collateral consequences, avoid homelessness and hospitalization, and prevent recidivism.

FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

During his Fellowship, Peter has:

- Represented 94 people in a variety of civil practice areas including family law, special education, guardianship, housing, employment, immigration, and juvenile proceedings
- Trained caseworkers and advocates throughout South Texas on alternatives to guardianship, special education law, and tips for advocating for people with mental illness before the Social Security Administration
- Developed a direct legal referral service for caseworkers at local mental health authorities in the Coastal Bend and Rio Grande Valley regions of South Texas

POST-FELLOWSHIP PLANS

Now that the Fellowship is complete, Peter plans to:

- Continue representing people with mental illness and other disabilities facing civil collateral consequences of criminal justice involvement as a Staff Attorney with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
- Expand the reach of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's public defender program by providing civil services in combination with criminal defense
- Train caseworkers, school staff, and family members on alternatives to guardianship, including Texas's new supported decision-making model
- Help juveniles and young adults who faced truancy charges expunge their criminal records