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September 14, 2010

United States Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Washington, DC

RE: Nomination of Brooks Douglass
2011 Ronald Wilson Reagan Public Policy Award

Dear Sir or Madam:

On October 15, 1979, Brooks Douglass, age 16, and his sister Leslie, age 12, saw their childhood come to a screaming end followed by years of agony and despair. On this mid-October evening, Brooks and Leslie were preparing to sit down for their evening family meal with their parents at their family home in rural Okarche, Oklahoma. Their father, Richard, was a prominent Southern Baptist minister and their mother, Marilyn, a proud mother and aspiring singer. At 7:45 p.m. they heard a knock on the door. Brooks opened the door to a stranger saying he was lost and asking to come in and use the phone. The first man was Glen Burton Ake and he was followed in by a second man, Steven Keith Hatch, carrying a double-barreled shotgun. Ake said "You know what it's all about," and pulled a .357 magnum from his boot.

Over the next two hours, the Douglass family were hog-tied face down on the carpet, all except for Leslie, who was ordered to show Ake where all the valuables were. After finding a total of \$43, Ake ordered Leslie to take off her clothes and proceeded to rape her, as the family lay nearby listening to her cries. Following this, Hatch then came in the room and also raped her. Leslie was brought back in the family room where the rest of the family was bound and she was restrained face-down in a similar fashion. As the family remained helpless on the floor, the two men ate their evening meal. Then Ake told Hatch to start the car "and listen for the sound" and then proceeded to shoot each member of the family in their back.

Somehow Brooks and Leslie survived although their parents were less fortunate. As they were able to break free, Brooks, still bleeding profusely, drove Leslie to the hospital. Still recovering from their physical wounds, Brooks and Leslie were unable to attend their parents' funerals. Leslie had suffered two bullet wounds through her back, piercing a lung and a kidney and ripping her intestines. Brooks suffered a severed esophagus, a collapsed lung and puncturing an area surrounding his heart. When they were eventually released from the hospital, they had to go to live with other family members and friends as their family belongings had to be sold at auction to pay for medical and funeral expenses. While many of us take such rights for granted today, at that time crime victims did not have any government support or restitution rights. Brooks and Leslie even had to pay for the hospital expenses of her rape kit!

After a five-week manhunt including additional murders committed by Ake and Hatch, they were caught and brought to trial. What followed was 17 years of court proceedings and retrials with Brooks and Leslie having to testify a total of 9 times. Even after Ake and Hatch were convicted and sentenced to die, neither Brooks nor Leslie were able to give a victim impact statement because that right did not exist in the state of Oklahoma.

Over the next several years, Brooks had an exceedingly difficult time adjusting to life without his parents as well as dealing with his flashbacks of this horrible night. He finished high school but initially dropped out of college after briefly attending Oklahoma Baptist University. After suffering additional setbacks, Brooks eventually graduated Baylor University with a degree in accounting and finance in 1985.

Ake's initial conviction and death sentence was overturned in 1986 because he was not provided a psychiatrist to aid in his defense. Subsequently, he was convicted once again but this time sentenced to life in prison. At the time of sentencing, the judge stated following advising Ake of his appeal rights, "You know, Mr. Ake, just once I'd like to be able to look at a victim of crime and read him just one right." Brooks would later state that he never forgot those words.

Brooks had the realization "that we had a system that literally stepped over the body of the victim to read the rights of the perpetrator, and that the defendant had more rights than the victim." Brooks also later stated that "he found out the hard way that victims' rights didn't exist and that in my heart, I knew something had to change."

What changed was Brooks decided to enroll in law school in 1988 at Oklahoma City University. Then, in 1990, at the age of 26, Brooks ran for the Oklahoma State Senate and was elected to a four-year term at the youngest age in state history, one month before receiving his law degree.

As a major part of his motivation to run for the senate, Brooks had stated "I have to know that the punishment that was given by a judge or jury for what that person did is going to be carried out and I don't have to spend the rest of my life looking over my shoulder to make sure that it's going to get done."

Over the next twelve years, Brooks authored and passed over a dozen crime victims' rights bills including a bill in 1992 allowing families of murder victims to give impact statements. Brooks also passed laws regarding right to restitution; confidentiality of victim information; rights of victims to attend all court proceedings; rights to be kept informed of case status; and, for the first time, the right of victims to attend the execution of their loved one's killer.

In 1995, Brooks had state business at the prison where both Ake and Hatch were being held. While Hatch was secluded on death row, Ake was in general population and Brooks did not want to turn a corner and run into him. He appealed to the prison warden to allow him to meet with Ake, provided Ake would consent to such a meeting. After much resistance, Brooks' request was granted. While many in the prison were concerned about Brooks' safety, he had not disclosed that he was a member of the Army's Special Forces Division and had been trained to kill with his hands.

At a meeting which lasted well over an hour, Ake repeatedly cried, apologized and begged for forgiveness. While Brooks admitted thinking for 15 years only of Ake's death, he found himself telling Ake he forgave him for what he did. Brooks would later state on several national TV interviews that the feeling which followed was "like poison draining out of my body. It was incredibly physical and unexpected." While still believing that Ake should die for what he did, Brooks also said "the sky was suddenly bluer and this enormous weight was lifted off my shoulders." While many in the victim's movement may not understand or agree with Brooks' actions, it struck a chord for many people across the nation as a sign of redemption and recognition of restorative justice. Others have stated that Brooks could overcome and forgive his parents' killer, their own problems paled in comparison.

In 1996, Brooks and Leslie became the first family members in Oklahoma to witness the execution process as they were present during Hatch's execution. While Brooks later explained that he found closure in the process and believed he could finally move forward with his life, Leslie found the whole process sterile and somewhat lacking. She had a hard time reconciling Hatch appearing to peacefully fall asleep while her memories of her families' suffering still seemed fresh years later.

In 2001, while family members of victims killed in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City awaited their opportunity to witness or deal with the pending execution of convicted killer Timothy McVeigh, Senator Brooks Douglass offered his personal support and counsel to comfort those about to experience what he had already been through himself.

Brooks decided not to run for re-election in 2002 turning his focus to private business opportunities, as well as his continued military service including serving on the staff of the Judge Advocate General in the Oklahoma National Guard. Additionally, Brooks saw action in Afghanistan with the Army Special Forces. Brooks also returned to school and received a post-graduate degree from the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government.

After staying out of the public arena for a number of years, Brooks reemerged a few years ago and agreed to limited public appearances to discuss his experiences as a victim, survivor and legislator and how he found his way to advocate within the system to protect future victims of crime. He has appeared multiple times, whenever requested, to speak to the California District Attorneys Association, with audiences ranging from elected DA's and staff to victim advocates and survivors. Most recently, Brooks accepted the invitation to speak at the 2010 National District Attorneys Summer Conference in Napa, California addressing over 250 attendees immediately following the keynote address by former United State Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (who ironically had authored the Court decision overturning Ake's initial conviction).

Brooks' primary passion the past several years, aside from his wife Julea and their two young children, has been how to share his life's story with expanded audiences to hopefully inspire and assist others across the nation in their healing process. He is accomplishing his goal at this very moment with the release of *Heaven's Rain*, a feature-length movie based on his life before and after the terrible night of October 15, 1979. Brooks has co-written and co-directed the movie as well as played the role of his father to honor his memory.

While I am unable to attach movie or video clips, you may view two trailers from the movie at www.heavensrainmovie.com. Additionally, there is an 8-minute news documentary covering Brooks' life which was produced several years ago and has many personal observations contained by both Brooks and Leslie. It may be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oZqTHa2I_s. In the alternative, you may Google [heavensrainmoviept2](#) and go to the link provided to view the two segments labeled pt1 and pt2. In this production, the ABC news reporter says of Brooks, "From broken victim to advocate for victims' rights, Senator Douglass has fought back within the system, introducing historic legislation to help empower him and others so abused to take back their lives."

While I have not directly referenced the questions listed in the criteria for the Ronald Wilson Reagan Public Policy Award, it is my hope that I have in my own way answered each and every question. Brooks has served victims of crime since he became one himself in 1979 and has never stopped doing so. He essentially created a number of crucial victims' rights in the state of Oklahoma while serving as a legislator. He has inspired countless numbers of prosecutors, victim advocates, government officials and survivors through his many public appearances over the years. His leadership and vision emanates from the very essence of his human core. He is a man of deep love, religious conviction and awareness that his experiences, while not entirely unique, give him a perspective that, thankfully, few other people possess. Now, through *Heaven's Rain*, he is reaching out to our entire nation.

As a county prosecutor and current President of the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), and further, on behalf my colleagues at NDAA and our NDAA Victims Advocacy Council, I am proud and privileged to offer the nomination of Brooks Douglass for the 2011 Ronald Wilson Reagan Public Policy Award.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J M Reams". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "M" followed by the name "Reams" in a cursive script.

James M. Reams
County Attorney Rockingham County/President NDAA