FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, May 20, 2014

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SACRAMENTO ABUSE VICTIM NAMED RECIPIENT OF CDAA WITNESS OF THE YEAR AWARD

(Sacramento, Calif.) -- The California District Attorneys Association (CDAA) has selected Curtishea C. as recipient of 2014 Patricia Lewis Witness of the Year Award. The award is presented annually by CDAA to honor a private citizen (victim or bystander) who, as a witness for the prosecution, demonstrates courage, social conscience, and a strong commitment to justice. Curtishea was nominated for this honor by the Sacramento County District Attorney’s Office.

Fourteen-year-old Curtishea overcame fear and adversity to ensure that the woman who abused her went to prison for those crimes.

Abandoned by her birth mother when she was just six months old, Curtishea was raised by her father who was in and out of trouble. Her father was sentenced to prison on robbery charges when the girl was 12 years old, and he left her in the care and custody of his fiancée, Duewa Lee. While living with Lee, Curtishea endured three long months of torment, ridicule, humiliation, and torture, sustaining deep physical scars and permanent disfigurement from the very person who was supposed to nurture and protect her.

The beatings and punishments occurred on a daily basis until she realized that she would most likely be killed. On a trip with her abuser to a Sacramento DMV branch, this brave young woman took a chance and reached out to a perfect stranger, asking a woman there to, “Please, please help me.” Her cry for help was heeded, investigators were contacted, and for the first time, Curtishea received medical treatment for her injuries.

This young lady’s courage before and during the trial were noteworthy in that she would not be deterred by the defendant or the defendant’s family from testifying and telling the truth. Despite hours on the stand and countless questions, Curtishea detailed the horror and brutality she suffered at the hands of her abuser with a clarity and poise beyond her years. Although she was shaking and crying during each break, she came back more determined than ever to finish, and tell the jury what happened. On the stand, a pediatric abuse expert testified that she had never seen abuse to that extent before, asserting that if Curtishea had suffered another blunt force trauma, she likely would have died.

Because of Curtishea’s strength to face her abuser despite her fear, Duewa Lee was convicted of torture, mayhem, and multiple counts of child abuse with great bodily injury. In September 2013, she was sentenced to 16 years to life in state prison.
This award is named for Los Angeles resident Patricia Lewis, who, in 1987, witnessed the murder of an innocent young man by a notorious Southern California gang leader. After her initial testimony, repeated attempts were made on her life, forcing her to live apart from her family in fear for their safety. Undaunted, she agreed to testify, and the result was the defendant’s conviction for first-degree murder.

CDAA serves as the primary source of continuing legal education and legislative advocacy for prosecutors throughout the state. In addition to offering seminars, publications, and extensive online tools, CDAA serves as a forum for the exchange of information and innovation in the criminal justice field.

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