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McGregor Fund Grant Helps to Launch the Detroit Justice Center

Detroit, MI, December 21, 2017 – The McGregor Fund is pleased to announce a \$600,000 lead gift to launch the Detroit Justice Center, a new community law center addressing the harmful consequences of mass incarceration and the criminalization of poverty for Detroit families. The Center will provide legal services for hundreds of low-income and indigent individuals facing barriers to employment, housing, driver’s licenses and other means to opportunity – barriers that can be caused by compounded traffic and other minor fines, low-level warrants, arrest and conviction records, and other justice system involvement. Over time, the Center will also help create housing and economic opportunities for returning citizens working hard to rebuild their lives and families, and advocate more broadly for restorative justice practices within the state and local criminal justice systems.

“Two in three families with an incarcerated loved one have difficulty meeting basic needs—buying food, keeping the lights on—because of their incarceration,” said founder and Executive Director Amanda Alexander, JD/PhD. “Over the past several years, it’s become clear to me that Detroit and other cities will never work for everyone unless we address mass incarceration and its ripple effects across the community. I look forward to working alongside Detroiters at the Detroit Justice Center, creating our vision for a just city together.”

“For years, the McGregor Fund has heard from social service agencies that the majority of their clients face material hardship because either a family member is currently incarcerated, or they themselves were formerly incarcerated and face residual legal barriers to restarting their lives,” said Kate Levin Markel, McGregor Fund President. “We have been looking for an opportunity to support comprehensive, civil legal services that offer the necessary specialization for very-low income families of incarcerated persons and returning

citizens. What makes the Detroit Justice Center so compelling is what Dr. Alexander brings to the effort: remarkable professional and organizational preparation, a bold, long-term vision for restorative justice reforms, and deeply rooted passion for this work and this community.”

Dr. Alexander currently serves on the faculty of the University of Michigan and is launching the Center following accomplishments as an attorney, system-reform advocate, nationally known thought-leader, researcher, and mentor to young attorneys. In 2013, she founded the Prison and Family Justice Project at the University of Michigan Law School to serve families divided by incarceration and the child welfare system. The Project works to reunite families by representing incarcerated parents in child welfare proceedings, helping clients clear warrants to keep their kids out of foster care, and representing grandparents to clear barriers to caring for their grandchildren while a parent is incarcerated. Through her advocacy and trainings, Dr. Alexander has worked to ensure that Michigan courts, attorneys, child welfare professionals, and others are equipped to better engage and support incarcerated parents.

Most recently, Dr. Alexander has devoted an Echoing Green Fellowship to nurturing the idea of the Center and developing a three-year launch plan with a goal of raising four lead gifts of \$600,000 each. The first was awarded in November 2017 by the NoVo Foundation, a national foundation based in New York City, NY. The second was awarded last week by the McGregor Fund, a Detroit-based foundation that supports both basic human needs and innovative projects to promote personal recovery and community restoration. Dr. Alexander was also recently selected for the inaugural cohort of the Unlocked Futures Accelerator, a collaboration of singer John Legend’s FREE AMERICA and New Profit Inc. All participants have personally experienced incarceration or the incarceration of a loved one, and are building a national network of organizations working to: help families remain connected; support people trying to stay out of prison; eliminate barriers created by justice system involvement; and improve justice systems to minimize its harm on families and communities.

The McGregor Fund is a private foundation established in 1925 by gifts from Katherine and Tracy McGregor “to relieve the misfortunes and promote the well being of humankind.” The geography of principal interest is the city of Detroit and Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties, and grantmaking prioritizes basic needs, recovery and restoration, and transformational skill building opportunities for teens and adults living in poverty. The McGregor Fund has granted over \$250 million since its founding and had assets of nearly \$172 million as of June 30, 2017.

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