



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **HOUSTON URBAN DEBATE LEAGUE ANNOUNCES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Houston Urban Debate League ('HUDL') today announced the appointment of Zenobia Harris Bivens as its new executive director. Her appointment is effective, March 3, 2014. Bivens succeeds Ronald G. Bankston who has served as HUDL's President and CEO since 2012.

HUDL is an organization that brings free debate programs to inner-city Houston Independent School District high schools and middle schools. HUDL supports more than 1000 students at 30 high schools and 7 middle schools and works to empower and provide life-changing opportunities to students in Houston's poorest communities. Nearly 100 percent of HUDL's students graduate from high school and nearly 90 percent of those graduates go on to attend college.

"Zenobia brings more than two decades of speech and debate experience to HUDL. Her solid experience, coupled with her enthusiasm and passion for debate, make her well-suited for this role," said Charles M. Chafer, Chairman of HUDL's Board of Directors. "She exemplifies the qualities our debaters strive to achieve and we are pleased to welcome her to lead our League."

"I am honored to join the Houston Urban Debate League team—debate programs are needed now more than ever," Bivens said. "Public speaking, critical thinking, writing, and reading are skills that are vital to being an empowered and informed member of our communities. That is the gift of debate. HUDL is at the forefront of efforts to make education in Houston-area schools a transformative experience. I am excited to join this groundbreaking movement to bring free debate programs to the schools that need it most."

Before joining HUDL, Bivens worked as an attorney at the law firms Vinson & Elkins LLP and Susman Godfrey LLP. Prior to her law firm tenure, Bivens served as a law clerk for the Honorable Carl E. Stewart, Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and for the Honorable Justice Dale Wainwright (ret.) of the Texas Supreme Court.

Bivens is also an accomplished public speaker. She is an American Forensics Association (AFA) National Speech Tournament national champion and five-time AFA national finalist. She is also a former high school and college public speaking and debate coach and has consulted at numerous public speaking and debate camps in California, Florida, and Texas.

Bivens earned her B.S. in Mass Communication-Broadcasting, magna cum laude, from West Texas A&M University; a M.A. in Communication Studies, summa cum laude, from the University of Alabama; and a J.D., cum laude, from Northwestern University School of Law.



In addition to serving as HUDL Executive Director, Bivens is an adjunct professor in the Communications Department at Lone Star College-North Harris and volunteers with the Rice University Speech and Debate team.