

Ohioans to Stop Executions

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://otse.org/issues/innocence-wrongful-convictions/>

Campaign and Advocacy

[Ohioans to Stop Executions](#)

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When execution is the outcome, the system must be perfect 100% of the time. **Since 1976, eleven men have been exonerated from death row.**

Two of these eleven cases were only discovered recently through [an analysis and special report by The Death Penalty Information Center](#).

Ohio has executed 56 people since the reinstatement of its capital punishment system. **This means that for every five executions, one person has been exonerated.**

On average, each man spent over 21 years imprisoned. Combined, they served 190 years incarcerated for crimes they did not commit.

To be considered an exoneree, he or she must fulfill three requirements:

The National Registry of Exonerations reports that 26 Ohioans were found guilty of murders they did not commit between 1975 and 2015. Half of these wrongfully convicted individuals 13 of 26 faced the death penalty.

Jim Petro

Gary Beeman was sentenced to death in 1976. His conviction was based on perjured testimony from a prison escapee who Beeman's lawyers were prevented from cross-examining. During Beeman's retrial, five witnesses testified that the testimony during the initial trial and that the star witness from 1976 was the killer, not Beeman. Beeman was acquitted in 1979.

Dale Johnston was sentenced to death in 1984 for the murders of his stepdaughter and her boyfriend. After undergoing hypnosis, a sole eyewitness identified Johnston as the killer. The only other primary witness provided boot print evidence that was later discredited. The authorities knew four other eyewitnesses with a completely different story of the crime, but they never disclosed them to the defense. Johnston was released in 1990.

Timothy Howard and **Gary Lamar James** were convicted of a murder during a bank robbery in 1976. They were released after new, previously undisclosed evidence was discovered. The evidence wasn't presented at their trial and included conflicting witness statements and fingerprints. Their charges were dismissed in 2003.

Derrick Jamison was sentenced to death in 1985 for the murder of a Cincinnati bartender. Prosecutors withheld critical evidence that would have pointed to Jamison's innocence, including eyewitness descriptions and statements contrary to the story told by Jamison's co-defendant. Jamison's charges were dismissed in 2005, twenty years after he was sent to death row.

Joe D'Ambrosio was sentenced to death in 1989 for murder of Anthony Klann. The federal district court overturned his conviction because the state had withheld evidence from the defense that proved his innocence. The court then barred his re-conviction trial due to further prosecutorial misconduct. D'Ambrosio's charges were dismissed in 2012, twenty-three years after he was sentenced to death row.

Ricky Jackson, Wiley Bridgeman, and Kwame Ajamu were sentenced to death for the 1975 murder of a money-order salesman in Cleveland. The state's case relied on testimony from a 12-year old who identified the three men as the perpetrators of the crime. In 2014, the witness recanted his testimony and admitted to being pressured by law enforcement to make the false identification. The men spent a combined total of nearly 90 years in prison and would have been executed in the 1970s had the U.S. Supreme Court not ruled the death penalty unconstitutional.

Charles Tolliver, who is Black, was convicted in Ohio by an all-white jury, and after his case was reversed because of the discriminatory use of peremptory strikes, he was acquitted at retrial.

In 2016, three men were exonerated from Ohio prisons, though they were not residing on death row. Laurese Glover, Eugene Johnson, and Derrick Wheatt were wrongfully convicted for the 1995 murder of Clifton Hudson in Cleveland. The three men were just boys 16, 17, and 17 respectively when they were accused and wrongfully convicted of the murder.

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, 59 Ohioans have been exonerated for crimes they did not commit. [32 of the exonerees \(54%\) were exonerated after being convicted of murder.](#)

56% of the wrongful convictions were for aggravated murder and death penalty eligible. Sixteen exonerees had [capital indictments](#) filed against them and faced the death penalty for crimes they did not commit.

Ohio legislators have opportunities to put protections in place that would address the problem of wrongful conviction. Over a dozen recommendations were made to the legislature by a Supreme Court Task Force in 2014. To date, none of those protections have been acted upon by state lawmakers. The recommendations included require accreditation of crime labs, electronic recordings of in-custody interrogations, enacting legislation stating the death penalty can only be imposed with DNA, video, video-taped confession, or other compelling evidence is present. The full list of recommendations can be found [here](#).

These reforms, if adopted, would address the leading factors contributing to wrongful conviction including mistaken witness identification, perjury or false accusation, official misconduct, false confessions, misleading evidence, and inadequate legal defense.

Wrongfully convicted men and women are a stark reminder the system all too often makes mistakes. And when an innocent person is executed, the mistake becomes irreversible.

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