



December 2015

WISHING YOU THE HAPPIEST OF HOLIDAYS

Dear Friends,

What an incredible year!

You helped us bring home TWO innocent men.

Without your support, **Christopher Abernathy** would be facing the rest of his life in prison and **Angel Gonzalez** 35 more years. Instead, for the first time in decades, they are free and home with their families for the holidays.

We are also celebrating favorable court decisions, an office bursting with more UIS student workers and community volunteers than ever, and our most successful Defenders of the Innocent event to date.

You helped make all of this happen.

Thank you for believing in us. Truly we could not do this work without you!

Wishing you peace and happiness this holiday season, The exonerees, staff, students and volunteers of the Illinois Innocence Project

Christopher Abernathy maintained his innocence during the 30 years he was imprisoned for a sexual assault he did not commit. In 2015, the Illinois Innocence Project secured the agreement of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office Conviction Integrity Unit to test critical crime scene evidence for DNA. The results entirely excluded Christopher, conclusively proved his innocence and established that his "confession" had been false. He was exonerated and released in February 2015.

Angel Gonzalez maintained his innocence during the 21 years he was imprisoned for a rape he did not commit. In 2013, the Illinois Innocence Project, in partnership with the New York based Innocence Project, obtained the agreement of the Lake County State's Attorney Office to conduct DNA testing on crime scene evidence. The results identified two distinct male DNA profiles – *neither* of which matched Angel's or the victim's boyfriend's DNA, making Angel's innocence scientifically absolute. He was exonerated and released in March 2015.