

Seek Justice

Illinois Innocence Project

January 2017

SAVE THE DATE!
10th Annual Defenders Event
Saturday, April 29, 2017

Popular New True-Crime Podcast Features IIP

IIP staff and students make an appearance on [Suspect Convictions](#), a new true-crime podcast quickly ascending to the top of the iTunes chart. The podcast, co-produced by veteran journalist Scott Reeder and WVIK, Quad Cities NPR, investigates the tragic 1990 murder of 9-year-old Jennifer Lewis and the conviction of Stanley Liggins.



Reeder, a UIS alum who was at the crime scene the night Jennifer's body was discovered burning in a field, has conducted a massive investigation examining evidence in the case, interviewing witnesses and exploring the lives of both the victim and the accused. WVIK journalist Lacy Scarmana, WVIK intern Alfredo Manteca and Reeder asked IIP to review the case, and recorded staff and student analysis to weave throughout the podcast.

After 26 years behind bars, Liggins has been granted a new trial, set to begin in May, based on allegations of hidden evidence and potential police misconduct. Because the crime occurred in Iowa and IIP takes only Illinois cases, the Project has played no role in Liggins' post-conviction appeal process.

IIP Guilty Plea Initiative Joins National "[Guilty Plea Problem](#)" Campaign

Who would plead guilty to a crime they did not commit?

One man with low cognitive functioning was chained to a wall for three days until he confessed to murder. Not understanding the legal system and with his confession ruled admissible by the judge, he took a guilty plea. Another man, in police custody on an unrelated matter at the time of the crime, pleaded guilty to murder after nearly three years in jail, where he was subjected to beatings by guards and false accusations by a jailhouse snitch.



These are just two cases IIP Attorney Lauren Myerscough-Mueller is tackling through IIP's new Guilty Plea Initiative, funded by a federal grant. IIP helped amend Illinois law in 2014 to allow people who pleaded

guilty to request post-conviction DNA, fingerprint and ballistics testing. Prior to that, innocent people who pleaded guilty had very little recourse to prove their innocence in Illinois.

To date, 337 innocent people nationwide, including 18 in Illinois, who pleaded guilty and were wrongfully incarcerated have been exonerated. IIP is joining with other innocence projects across the country to fight the “guilty plea problem.” To learn more, visit [The Guilty Plea Problem](#) campaign.