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Preventing Wrongful Convictions Is the First Step

Keeping innocent people out of prison starts with *preventing* wrongful convictions. Police officers are an integral part of that prevention.

"No police officer I have ever met wants to have anyone convicted of a crime they did not commit," says Mike Schlosser, director of the University of Illinois Police Training Institute (PTI) and recipient of IIP's 2017 Defender of the Innocent award for his leadership in establishing the Wrongful Conviction Training program at PTI.

"I wanted recruits to be aware of the statistical data on wrongful convictions, which is staggering," Schlosser says. "I wanted them to know how innocent people end up getting convicted for crimes they didn't commit and to understand how they can help prevent wrongful convictions through best practice policing."

IIP Exonerée Teshome Campbell brings reality to training sessions by sharing how he was wrongly convicted, in part due to problems with eyewitness identification, one of the leading causes of wrongful convictions. The officers are riveted by [Teshome's story](#) of surviving 18 years in prison as an innocent man.

"When class is over, the recruits surround Teshome, thank him for speaking and talk to him, sometimes for more than an hour," Schlosser says. "They talk about it for days after. They begin to understand not only the impact of wrongful conviction on one particular innocent person but the impact on family, too."

IIP is *one of only two* innocence organizations nationwide educating police about how innocent people get pegged for crimes they did not commit. The majority of each recruit class participates in the optional program. Feedback from the 400+ recruits trained by IIP is overwhelmingly positive, which Schlosser says gives him a good feeling about the future of policing.

"Recruit officers are our future investigators, command officers, chiefs and sheriffs," he says. "They understand that IIP and law enforcement share the same goal of seeking truth. And they want to be part of that process."

"My job is to find the truth, not just get an arrest or conviction."

Wrongful Conviction Training participant