



June 2020

IIP Client Nathaniel Onsrud released after 13 years in prison as an innocent man

We are thrilled to announce our client, Nathaniel Onsrud, walked out of Menard Correctional Center today after 13 years in prison as an innocent man. His conviction and sentence were vacated today in a hearing in Rock Island County.

Nate was just 20 when he was wrongfully accused of the 2007 murder of his four-month-old baby. His son had been born 10 weeks premature and had significant health issues, and his death was the result of medical complications.

Initial medical examinations did not reveal foul play and the forensic pathologist brought in to consult on the case was reluctant to determine the death was a homicide. After investigators focused on Nate, they had multiple meetings with the pathologist to devise a new (yet erroneous) theory – that he had caused his son's death. Nate was subjected to two interviews and finally, after continual questioning, made ambiguous statements that investigators determined was a “confession.”

Based on the alleged confession and that there was a tragic death of a baby, Nate's defense attorney advised him to plead guilty, which he did. Nate soon after sought to withdraw his guilty plea, but his request was denied and he was sentenced to 60 years in prison. (False confessions have played a role in the wrongful conviction of 96 individuals in Illinois – nearly 30 percent of the state's 331 exonerations, according to the National Registry of Exonerations. Additionally, there is now an increased understanding that innocent people do in fact plead guilty, and all too often. Nate is one of at least 100 innocent Illinoisans who have been acknowledged as innocent but who pled guilty.)

When Nate's legal team, led by IIP Chicago Legal Director Lauren Kaeseberg and pro bono attorneys from the law firm Erickson & Oppenheimer, sought additional documents from the prosecutor's file, the Rock Island County State's Attorney discovered materials supporting Nate's innocence that were never disclosed to his defense attorney. The state supported our request to vacate his conviction and sentence, and release him immediately.

Today's result is an example of the extraordinary power a prosecutor holds, and in this case we see both sides of the coin. Nate was convicted due to unethical conduct of a prosecutor who withheld exculpatory documents but his freedom today is due in large part to a prosecutor who seeks to do justice and has demonstrated the highest ethics we should expect of all prosecutors. To that end, the Rock Island County State's Attorney Dora Villarreal [has announced](#) they will undertake an audit of past cases prosecuted by the original prosecutor on Nate's case and seek the support of local elected officials to form a Criminal Integrity Unit within the State's Attorney's office.

Nate is our 16th client to be released or exonerated. His sentence was scheduled to be completed in August of 2070. He is now 33 and, thanks to your continued support of our work, has the opportunity to create a life for himself. Please join us in welcoming Nate home.

KWQC Davenport article: [Conviction, sentence vacated for Coal Valley man in death of infant son](#)

**Our work to free our innocent clients during the COVID-19 outbreak in Illinois prisons is urgent.
Please help us help them by making a donation today.**