



August 2026

Summer Update

The UIS campus is bustling with the start of a new academic year. IIP's nine undergraduate interns have arrived and met for the first time. Before the final stretch of our 25th Anniversary Year hits, here's a recap of this summer's news:

- In June, **our client** [Nate Onsrud was fully exonerated](#) after six years of litigation following his release in 2020.
- **IIP introduced our** [new website](#), a year in the making. We're excited to continue building it out but have received positive comments so far.
- In July, IIP **celebrated the** [signing of the "exoneree restitution" bill](#) (HB 3663) with clients and their loved ones, IIP volunteers, IIP staff and bill sponsors Senator Elgie Sims and Representative Justin Slaughter. Already we have seen the court's approval of full restitution for Illinois exonerees possessing certificates of innocence.
- We just marked **over 9,000 law enforcement members** trained through our Wrongful Conviction Awareness and Avoidance police training program. Recently we had our first-ever sessions held on the same day in two separate locations. We've built a strong bench of IIP trainers, which will help us continue expanding the program.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF FREEDOM AND REFORM

IIP's 25th Anniversary Gala
Saturday, November 7, 2026
5:00 to 8:30 pm
Crowne Plaza Springfield

Join us for an unforgettable evening as we celebrate 25 years of the Illinois Innocence Project! Experience the fight to free innocent people through spoken word, live music, presentation of our 2026 Defender of the Innocent Award and recognition of the many freed and exonerated individuals in attendance.

REGISTER NOW

August in IIP History

This 25th anniversary monthly series highlights key moments in IIP's history.



2014 – DNA testing ordered in Christopher Abernathy case

In August 2014, with agreement of the Cook County Conviction Integrity Unit, an order was entered to conduct DNA testing on eight evidence items in the case of IIP's client Christopher Abernathy. Results excluded Christopher from all items and proved his innocence. At a hearing in February 2015, the CIU agreed the convictions should be vacated and the charges dismissed. After nearly 30 years wrongfully imprisoned, Christopher was released three hours later to his waiting mother, who had visited him 965 times over the years. Pictured here is Christopher the moment he stepped out of Stateville with mother on the right.



2016 – Exoneree Jason Strong visits UIS

Exoneree Jason Strong, who passed away earlier this month after a cancer battle, first visited UIS in August 2016. The Center on Wrongful Convictions secured Jason's exoneration and release in 2015. His lawyers showed his "confession" was coerced, the alleged co-defendants had recanted, the pathologist's testimony was wildly inaccurate and there were multiple viable alternative suspects. Jason was a beloved member of the freed/exonerated community nationwide. He left a powerful legacy in his dedication to educating law enforcement as one of the founding exoneree speakers of IIP's Wrongful Conviction Awareness and Avoidance training program.



2018 – Call to override governor’s veto

In August 2018, with the help of Illinois exoneree Martin Reeves, IIP put out a call to action to override then-Gov. Bruce Rauner’s veto of SB 1830, introduced by IIP in collaboration with the Innocence Project, to curb the use of testimony provided by “jailhouse informants.” Martin had been wrongfully convicted based in part on the testimony of a jailhouse informant and spent 18 years wrongfully imprisoned. Gov. Rauner had vetoed the bill after the Illinois state legislature passed it with bipartisan support. During veto session, the General Assembly overturned Rauner’s veto 80-31. On January 1, 2019, the bill became the nation’s strongest law seeking to prevent wrongful convictions based on “jailhouse informant” testimony.



2019 – Nearly 500 police cadets trained in wrongful convictions

In 2019, IIP announced nearly 500 police cadets representing 107 police departments across Illinois had taken IIP’s “Wrongful Conviction Avoidance” training class, first introduced in partnership with the Police Training Institute (PTI) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2016. At the time, PTI served as the testing ground for this training. Though optional, an average of 75-80% of each cadet class enroll, proving interest among future officers, investigators, chiefs and sheriffs in the issue of wrongful conviction and what law enforcement can do to help prevent these miscarriages of justice. Then, as now, cadets said hearing from and interacting with the exoneree presenters was the most meaningful part of the training.



2022 – Marilyn Mulero Exonerated

In 1993, Marilyn Mulero was sentenced to death after being framed by corrupt Chicago Detective Reynaldo Guevara for a murder she did not commit. After fighting for almost three decades to bring light to the widespread misconduct of this detective, Marilyn was exonerated on August 9, 2022. She was the first female victim of Guevara to be exonerated among nearly 30 Guevara-related homicide convictions that had been overturned to date. Marilyn was wrongfully imprisoned 28 years, including five years on death row. "Today's exoneration of Marilyn is a shining example of perseverance and a testament to the power of the human spirit," IIP Legal Director Lauren Kaeseberg said.



2022 – Client David Staples released

On August 12, 2022, longtime IIP client David Staples walked free after 29 years of wrongful imprisonment after being wrongfully convicted in 1993 of a murder he did not commit. IIP had successfully advocated for a shortened sentence, shaving years off his original sentence. Members of his close-knit family and a contingent of supporters welcomed him to freedom. During his wrongful imprisonment, David obtained a bachelor's degree through the Augustana Prison Education Program. In freedom, David has joined a strong community of innocent people who have been released under similar circumstances and for whom IIP continues to fight to fully provide their innocence.