

The Innocence Project at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law was created by Barry C. Scheck and Peter J. Neufeld in 1992. It was set up as and remains a non-profit legal clinic. This Project only handles cases where postconviction DNA testing of evidence can yield conclusive proof of innocence. As a clinic, students handle the case work while supervised by a team of attorneys and clinic staff.

Most of our clients are poor, forgotten, and have used up all of their legal avenues for relief. The hope they all have is that biological evidence from their cases still exists and can be subjected to DNA testing. All Innocence Project clients go through an extensive screening process to determine whether or not DNA testing of evidence could prove their claims of innocence. Thousands currently await our evaluation of their cases.

DNA testing has been a major factor in changing the criminal justice system. It has provided scientific proof that our system convicts and sentences innocent people -- and that wrongful convictions are not isolated or rare events. Most importantly, DNA testing has opened a window into wrongful convictions so that we may study the causes and propose remedies that may minimize the chances that more innocent people are convicted.

As forerunners in the field of wrongful convictions, the Innocence Project has grown to become much more than the "court of last resort" for inmates who have exhausted their appeals and their means. We are now helping to organize The Innocence Network, a group of law schools, journalism schools, and public defender offices across the country that assists inmates trying to prove their innocence whether or not the cases involve biological evidence which can be subjected to DNA testing. We consult with legislators and law enforcement officials on the state, local, and federal level, conduct research and training, produce scholarship, and propose a wide range of remedies to prevent wrongful convictions while continuing our work to free innocent inmates through the use of postconviction DNA testing.

We hope that this site will raise awareness and concern about the failings of our criminal justice system. It is a facet of our society that eventually touches all of its citizens. The prospect of innocents languishing in jail or, worse, being put to death for crimes that they did not commit should be intolerable to every American, regardless of race, politics, sex, origin, or creed.

Innocence Project
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