

ABOUT CIP

What is the California Innocence Project?

CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE PROJECT

CALIFORNIA WESTERN
SCHOOL OF LAW | San Diego



Message from the Director

In 1999, we founded the California Innocence Project with 3 goals: 1) to free innocent people from prison; 2) to provide outstanding training to our law students so they will become great lawyers; and 3) to change laws and procedures to decrease the number of wrongful convictions and improve the justice system.

I am very proud of the accomplishments we have achieved with all of these goals. We have brought home many innocent clients over the years and experienced the joy of reuniting them with their families. We have seen our law graduates go on to do great things. And, we have participated in changing many laws that assist our work and improve the lives of our clients.

Over the years it has given me great joy to see our work go global in an "innocence movement" that grows bigger and stronger every day. Our project has been deeply involved in Latin America, launching [Red Inocenté](#), a network of innocence projects throughout the region. We have also been involved in international cases, helping to free Jason Puracal from Nicaragua and representing Grace and Mathew Huang in their wrongful incarceration case in Qatar.

There is still a great deal of work for us to do and it's not cheap. Simple expenses like gas money for us to visit our clients in remote prisons, our phone bill so clients can call us from prison, and copies of transcripts and crime scene photos can add up. I encourage you to explore our website and consider donating. Your generous contribution is 100% tax deductible and will be used to further the work of our project.

Justin Brooks

Director, California Innocence Project

What is the Innocence Project | About the Project

What is the California Innocence Project?

The California Innocence Project (CIP) is a law school clinical program at California Western School of Law dedicated to releasing wrongfully convicted inmates and providing an outstanding educational experience to the students enrolled in the clinic.

Founded in 1999, CIP reviews more than 2,000 claims of innocence from California inmates each year. Students who participate in the year-long clinic work alongside CIP staff attorneys on cases where there is strong evidence of factual innocence. Together, they have secured the release of many innocent people who otherwise may have spent the rest of their lives in prison.

Clinic students assist in investigation and litigation by locating and re-interviewing witnesses, examining new evidence, filing motions, securing experts, and providing support to attorneys during evidentiary hearings and trials. CIP has trained more than 200 students who have gone on to become highly successful criminal defense attorneys, criminal prosecutors, Assistant Attorneys General, and civil attorneys; all of whom, after their experience in CIP, believe in a fair and honest justice system and realize there is always room for improvement in the law.



Download

Our Case Screening
(English) QUESTIONNAIRE

(Spanish) SPANISH Questionnaire

How do you submit a case for review?

The California Innocence Project provides pro bono (free of charge) legal assistance to inmates who maintain their factual innocence in the participation of the crime(s) for which they were convicted. In such cases, new, strong evidence of innocence must exist. The California Innocence Project does not limit its review process to DNA cases. They also review cases that may involve witness recantations, changes in science, government misconduct, or ineffective assistance of counsel – so long as there is evidence of innocence in support of the claim.

The California Innocence Project only accepts cases where the conviction occurred in the following Southern California counties: Imperial, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura.

The California Innocence Project will review a case post-conviction and post-sentencing. The California Innocence Project will not provide legal assistance during the time of pre-trial or trial.

In order to submit a case to the California Innocence Project for consideration, the inmate must complete and sign the Case Screening Questionnaire. The questionnaire requests specific supporting documents that must also be submitted before the review process can begin. DO NOT submit any transcripts unless a California Innocence Project representative speaks to you and requests them. It is highly recommended to submit only photocopies of legal documents due to the fact that the California Innocence Project is not responsible for the loss of returned mail.

Recap of Requirements:

- Convicted in Southern California
- Claiming factual innocence of all involvement
- In prison or jail

Completed questionnaires and supporting documents can be submitted below.

Otherwise, materials may be mailed to the California Innocence Project at 225 Cedar Street, San Diego, CA 92101. With pre-authorization from a California Innocence Project representative, documents can be hand delivered to the security desk at 350 Cedar Street, San Diego, CA 92101, Attn: California Innocence Project.

Your Name (required)

Inmate's Name (required)

Inmate's CDCR # (required)

Your Email (required)

Subject

Your Message

Upload Completed & Signed Questionnaire

No file chosen

[About CIP](#) [Legal Assistance](#) [Brian Banks](#) [XONR8 Gear](#)
[California Western School of Law](#) [Contact Us](#) [Support the Project](#)

CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE

P R O J E C T



OUR ISSUES

The California Innocence Project investigates cases of wrongful conviction and looks for new, strong evidence of innocence. During our investigation and litigation phases, we and our clients encounter several issues that arise during the initial police investigation, during the trial, or during post-conviction proceeding. All issues point to flaws in the criminal justice system and reforms are needed and available to prevent wrongful convictions occurring.

Police Investigation

When a crime is reported, the initial police investigation is crucial to determining who the suspect or perpetrator is. The failure of law enforcement to conduct an adequate investigation can lead to a wrongfully accused person. Once a wrongful accusation has been made, the error may or may not be discovered before a conviction takes place.

The leading cause of wrongful convictions is eyewitness misidentification. The conditions under which the witness observed the events taking place can lead to an inaccurate description of the suspect. In addition, the incorrect administration of an eyewitness identification procedure can also lead to the wrong person being picked. For example, a witness may identify the suspect as the person they saw using a six-pack photo lineup but the photos of the non-suspect do not match the description given by the witness.

False confessions can also play a role. Police must use proper techniques when interrogating a suspect or witness. For example, interrogating a suspect for several hours straight or verbally abusing a suspect during questioning can cause a person to sign a false confession. Additionally, a witness may intentionally or unintentionally give false information to police, leading to a person being wrongfully accused.

Forensic science also plays a key role during police investigations. Failure to properly secure or investigate a crime scene can lead to the destruction or non-collection of key forensic evidence that can provide clues as to who committed the crime. For example, if DNA evidence is not collected, collected improperly, or stored improperly, then the inmate will have difficulty using post-conviction DNA testing years later to prove their innocence.

Trial

At trial, one of the causes of wrongful convictions may be present. During their investigation, innocence projects often look for evidence of ineffective assistance of counsel. To adequately prepare for a trial, defense counsel should properly investigate the case and explore all avenues where there may be evidence of innocence. However, in cases of ineffective assistance of counsel, trial counsel may fail to investigate witnesses that could provide an alibi for their client, investigate information as to who the real perpetrator is, or analyze forensic evidence found at the scene.

Wrongfully convicted clients may have also faced prosecutorial misconduct during trial. A common example found in exonerations is the prosecution's failure to turn over evidence of innocence to defense counsel, or a Brady material violation. The undisclosed evidence is often police reports or witness statements supporting a claim of innocence that had never been turned over to the inmate or defense counsel.

Post Conviction Proceedings

During post-conviction investigation and proceedings, innocence projects face several issues unique to wrongful convictions.

Advances in forensic science research has played an increasingly bigger role in exonerations, in both the DNA and non-DNA evidence. Advances in science have resulted in the ability to conduct DNA testing on evidence that was not previously possible. The development of different types of testing such as mitochondrial DNA testing and Y-DNA testing have also expanded the ability of projects to prove

innocence. Innocence projects would like more access to CODIS, the national database containing DNA profiles of state and federal inmates. The ability to compare unknown DNA profiles from crime scenes with those in the database can definitively prove who the real perpetrator is.

In the non-DNA area, several forensic sciences have been the subject of new research studies evaluating their reliability in convicting someone. The new research has led innocence projects to re-examine the expert analysis used at trial to convict inmates. In many cases, innocence projects have discovered that their client was convicted using unreliable, or even “junk,” science. In those cases, exonerations have occurred where the convictions have relied on expert analysis in areas such as bite mark evidence, firearms analysis, fingerprint analysis, and Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Innocence projects are also active in life after exoneration issues. Most exonerees leave prison with few resources to transition to a life of freedom. In the states that have compensation statutes, projects will help with the application process and litigate the claim if possible. The amount of compensation and the success in obtaining it varies from state to state.

[About CIP](#) [Legal Assistance](#) [Brian Banks](#) [XONR8 Gear](#)
[California Western School of Law](#) [Contact Us](#) [Support the Project](#)



**Design by M Semanchik | © 2016 | California Innocence Project | 225 Cedar
Street | San Diego | CA | 92101**