

## Legislation Text

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Honoring the tenth anniversary of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, a leading criminal justice reform organization dedicated to securing freedom for the unjustly imprisoned, preventing wrongful convictions and aiding exonerees' transition to restoration.

WHEREAS, The United States, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the City of Philadelphia are commissioned to protect due process and to prevent the unjust deprivation of liberty. Nonetheless, far too many people suffer wrongs in our criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, Since 1989, more than 2,500 individuals have been exonerated from wrongful convictions across the nation. Collectively, these individuals have lost over 21,000 years of their lives serving sentences due to improper verdicts; and

WHEREAS, As a response to the proliferation of wrongful convictions, in 2008, David Richman and David Rudovsky lead a coalition of attorneys to establish the Pennsylvania Innocence Project (the PA Innocence Project or the Project). The Project began operation in April 2009 at Temple University Beasley School of Law with the ardent support of then Dean JoAnne Epps. The organization's partnerships now include all of the law schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, In 2016, PA Innocence Project opened an office in Pittsburgh, PA housed by Duquesne University School of Law and with support from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. The opening of the Pittsburgh office made the Project the first exoneration organization to host multiple locations in the same state; and

WHEREAS, The Project's legacy of giving hope and affirming the experience of those harmed by barriers in our legal system is actualized by (1) securing the exoneration, release from imprisonment, and restoration to society of persons who are innocent and have been wrongly convicted; (2) providing clinical training and experience to students in the fields of law, journalism, criminal justice, and forensic science; (3) collaborating with law enforcement agencies and the courts to address systemic causes of wrongful convictions; and (4) strengthening and improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania through public education and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, A great deal of the Project's advocacy is comprised of promoting legislative forms to broaden the access of the convicted innocent to the courts and to obtain compensation from the state for the years exonerees spent wrongfully incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, Since 2009, the Project's staff members have worked selflessly and uncompromisingly to identify injustice and secure the exoneration of seventeen individuals, also known as Heroes of Justice - Lance Felder, Jim Fogle, Eugene Gilyard, Kenneth Granger, Marshall Hale, Chester Hollman III, James Hugney, Sr., Lorenzo Johnson, Han Tak Lee, John Miller, Dontia Patterson, Larry Trent Roberts, Donte Rollins, Letitia Smallwood, Shaurn Thomas, Willie Veasy, and Crystal Weimer. Together, these exonerees served 395 years in prison for crimes they did not commit; and

WHEREAS, The Project also helped free four men - Rusty Brensinger, Greg Brown, Tyrone Jones, and Robert Outlaw - who are still fighting for their exoneration; and

WHEREAS, The wrongly convicted, their loved ones, and their communities suffer trauma from the experience of being wrongfully incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, The PA Innocence Project recognizes that the healing process for the wrongly imprisoned and their communities begins, as opposed to ends, upon release and steps in to support exonerees with re-entry resources where state-sanctioned social services are missing; and

WHEREAS, We commend the PA Innocence Project's honorable service to the disenfranchised and appreciatively encourage its role in the criminal justice reform movement to protect the liberties and freedoms of the innocent; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED THAT THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors the tenth anniversary of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, a leading criminal justice reform organization dedicated to securing freedom for the unjustly imprisoned, preventing wrongful convictions and aiding exonerees' transition to restoration.