

Legislation Text

File #: 170607, **Version:** 0

Recognizing and honoring the Pennsylvania Innocence Project for its advocacy on behalf of wrongfully convicted Pennsylvanians and promotion of criminal justice system reforms to enhance conviction integrity.

WHEREAS, In 2008, a group of lawyers, under the leadership of David Richman and David Rudovsky, founded the Pennsylvania Innocence Project. With the enthusiastic support of Dean JoAnne Epps, the Project found its home at Temple University's Beasley School of Law and opened its doors in April 2009; and

WHEREAS, In the Fall of 2009, the Pennsylvania Innocence Project began working with students from Temple Law School and Villanova University School of Law to screen and evaluate cases. Since then, the Project has created partnerships with Thomas R. Kline Drexel School of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School, Rutgers University Law School, and Penn State School of Law. In 2016, the Project added an office in Pittsburgh, housed by Duquesne University Law School, and including interns from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law to better serve clients incarcerated in Western Pennsylvania and build upon the nationwide movement to examine the cases of individuals who may have been wrongfully convicted; and

WHEREAS, In eight years of work, the Pennsylvania Innocence Project has succeeded in vacating the convictions of six Pennsylvanians - Eugene Gilyard, Lance Felder, Jim Fogle, Donte Rollins, Shaurn Thomas and Crystal Weimer; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Innocence Project has also secured new trials for two Pennsylvanians wrongly convicted, and helped in two cases which resulted in *Alford* pleas - where the men pled no contest to reduced charges, while asserting their innocence, and were immediately released from prison; and

WHEREAS, A Pennsylvania Innocence Project client, Tyrone Jones <<http://innocenceprojectpa.org/tyrone-jones-released-after-43-years-in-prison/>>, was among the first Pennsylvanians resentenced as a former "juvenile lifer." Tyrone was paroled even as he continued to assert his innocence; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Innocence Project also works to promote legislation to expand Pennsylvania's post-conviction laws so as to allow convicted individuals a fair opportunity to present evidence of their innocence - including an update to our post-conviction DNA access law; and

WHEREAS, The Project also provides support and training to lawyers litigating post-conviction claims of innocence and regularly files "friend of the court" briefs in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the Superior Court of Pennsylvania, supporting broader interpretation of our statutes to benefit the wrongfully convicted; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Innocence Project has worked to improve the criminal justice system to prevent innocent people from being convicted, by educating stakeholders in the system on the reasons for wrongful conviction and by promoting policies that can help prevent such unjust convictions from recurring; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY VIRTUE OF THIS CITATION, THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA,

Hereby honors the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, for its mission of securing the exoneration, release from imprisonment, and restoration to society of persons who are innocent and have been wrongly convicted, its collaboration with law enforcement agencies and the courts to address systemic causes of wrongful convictions, and its efforts to enhance conviction integrity in Pennsylvania.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be sent to the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, as evidence of the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.