THE NATIONAL REGISTRY OF EXONERATIONS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

THE NATIONAL REGISTRY OF EXONERATIONS | April 6, 2026

A PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE NEWKIRK CENTER FOR SCIENCE & SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL, AND MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

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MAIN FINDINGS

EXONERATIONS. The Registry recorded 97 exonerations that occurred in 2025.

OFFICIAL MISCONDUCT. Official misconduct occurred in at least 70 exonerations in 2025. Forty homicide cases—78% of the 51 homicide exonerations in 2025—were marred by official misconduct.

THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL EXONERATORS. Professional exonerators—Innocence Organizations (IOs) and Conviction Integrity Units (CIUs)—continued to play essential roles. IOs took part in 41 exonerations, and CIUs helped secure 23 exonerations. IOs and CIUs worked together on nine exonerations in 2025, 9% of the total. Overall, 56 (58%) of the exonerations in 2025 involved a professional exonerator.

NO-CRIME CASES. Of the 97 exonerations in 2025, 32% were no-crime cases. These 31 exonerations included wrongful convictions for drug possession, homicide, sexual assault, and child sex abuse. No-crime exonerations occur when an exoneree was convicted of a crime that did not occur. For example, the "crime" may have been an accident, an act of self-defense, a suicide that was mistaken for a crime, or the exoneree may have been accused of a fabricated crime that never happened.

RACE AND WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS. Seventy-eight percent of exonerations last year (76/97) were people of color. Sixty-one percent of the exonerees (59/97) were Black. For a larger discussion on the role of race in wrongful convictions, please see our 2022 report on the subject.

YEARS LOST TO WRONGFUL IMPRISONMENT. Persons exonerated in 2025 lost an average of 14.2 years to wrongful imprisonment for crimes they did not commit—1,373 years in total. Thirty-seven percent (36/97)of the persons exonerated lost more than 20 years each. Of those, 13 spent more than 30 years in prison, and three of those spent more than 40 years in prison for crimes they did not commit.

COMPENSATION. Total payments in the form of state compensation or civil damage awards to exonerees since 1989 now exceed $5.5 billion.

CRIMES

HOMICIDE: Fifty-one defendants were exonerated of homicide—45 for murder, and six for manslaughter–53% of all exonerations and 63%of violent crimes (51/81). One exoneree from 2025 was sentenced to death.

SEXUAL ASSAULT: Thirteen defendants were exonerated of sexual offenses; eight in cases where the principal crime was sexual assault of an adult, and five where the principal crime was child sex abuse.

OTHER VIOLENT CRIMES: Seventeen defendants were exonerated for other violent crimes, such as assault, robbery, and attempted murder.

In total, 84% (81/97) of the exonerations in 2025 were for violent crimes. See Table 1 for a breakdown of exonerations by crime.

NON-VIOLENT CRIMES: Sixteen defendants were exonerated of non-violent offenses, including four misdemeanors.

Table 1: Exonerations in 2025 by Crime

Homicide	**51 (53%)**
Murder	45
Manslaughter	6
Sex Crimes	**13 (13%)**
Sexual Assault (of an adult)	8
Child Sex Abuse	5
Other Violent Crimes	**17 (18%)**
Robbery	5
Attempted Murder	5
Assault	5
Other Violent	2
Nonviolent Crimes	**16 (16%)**
Drug crimes	6
Burglary	5
Other Non-Violent	5
Total	**97 (100%)**

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

OFFICIAL MISCONDUCT: We know of official misconduct in 70, or 72% of exonerations that occurred in 2025. In 2024, official misconduct was present in 70% of the 158 exonerations. Most of the 2025 exonerations that included official misconduct involved more than one kind of misconduct, such as the failure to disclose exculpatory evidence to the defense (55 cases), witness tampering (42 cases), perjury by an official actor (30 cases), misconduct in interrogations (11 cases), knowingly permitting perjured testimony (10 cases), prosecutorial dishonesty in court (7 cases), or forensic misconduct (2 cases).

MISTAKEN WITNESS IDENTIFICATION: Twenty-two exonerations in 2025 (23%) were for convictions based at least in part on mistaken witness identifications. In 2024, 27% (43/158) of the exonerations involved mistaken witness identifications.

FALSE CONFESSIONS: Nineteen exonerations (20%) included false confessions. In 2024, 14% (22/158) of the exonerations included false confessions.

PERJURY OR FALSE ACCUSATION: Seventy-one exonerations (73%) included perjury or false accusations. This is the same as 2024 when 73% (115/158) of the exonerations included perjury or false accusations.

FALSE OR MISLEADING FORENSIC EVIDENCE: Thirty-nine exonerations (40%) included false or misleading forensic evidence. This is an increase from 2024, when 29% (44/158) included false or misleading forensic evidence.

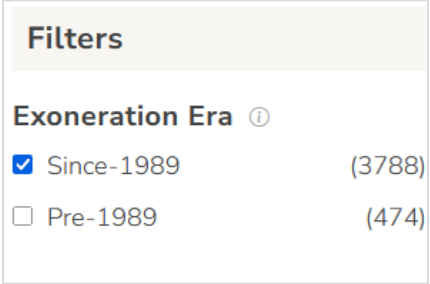
INADEQUATE LEGAL DEFENSE: Thirty-two exonerations (33%) included inadequate legal defense (ILD). This is down slightly from 2024, when 35% (56/158) of the exonerations included inadequate legal defense. ILD is the Registry variable that captures much of the same qualifying conduct for ineffective assistance of counsel claims

GROUP EXONERATIONS

We published four cases, representing **112** individuals, in our Groups Registry. In each of these cases, the exonerations are tied together by a pattern of systematic official misconduct either in the investigation and prosecution of these cases or misconduct committed by a single official actor involved in the case. At the time of this report, the Registry lists **49** cases, involving **37,356** defendants in the Groups Registry.

PRE-1989 EXONERATIONS

In 2025, as part of the launch of our new website, the Registry's data table began to allow searches combining the previously distinct "Pre-1989 Database" with our main exonerations dataset. All individual exonerations are searchable and can now be combined or distinguished, using the "Exoneration Era" filter.



Pre-1989 exonerations are researched and coded carefully, but due to several factors, including the passage of time and the unavailability of many court documents, the data is not as robust as the data for exonerations since 1989. Not all variables that are coded for exonerations since 1989 are coded for pre-1989 exonerations. The "tooltip" icons next to each filter on the table page indicate whether the variable is coded for pre-1989 exonerations. The numbers we refer to in this report, and in all of our publications, unless otherwise noted, reflect data from exonerations since 1989.

In 2025, we added eight pre-1989 exonerations, dating as far back as 1911. At the time of this report, we list 474 pre-1989 exonerations, from 1820 to the end of 1988.

HOW CASES ARE ADDED TO THE REGISTRY

The number of exonerations in the National Registry of Exonerations is a basement figure. We don't know how many exonerations there have been. We only know about the ones we have discovered. We learn about exonerations from a variety of sources, including our own research, innocence organizations, conviction integrity units, the news media, defense attorneys, and sometimes the exonerees themselves.

Identifying and adding exonerations to the National Registry of Exonerations is a process that can be serendipitous, but is by no means predictable. With more than 3,100 counties and 94 federal judicial districts, it is impossible to ferret out all cases that would meet our criteria.

During the 2025 calendar year, the Registry added 47 exonerations that occurred between 1989 and 2024. These are exonerations that we did not learn of until after December 31, 2024. This is why we advise caution about relying on statistics in our annual reports. The constant addition of older exonerations means that relying on the online interactive database will always generate the most up-to-date and accurate statistics.

The Registry learns about old exonerations all the time. We add them as soon as we discover them and determine they meet our criteria. For example, in its March/April 2025 issue, *Mother Jones* magazine published an article about the emotionally wrenching case of Taylor Cadle, who was falsely convicted of reporting that she had been raped. She had been exonerated in 2017. Had Taylor not come forward with her story and had *Mother Jones* not published it, we would not have known about the case.

We also learn about cases through the efforts of Professor Jeffrey Gutman of the George Washington University Law School, who is a Special Contributor to the Registry. Professor Gutman studies compensation for exonerees and frequently finds cases of individuals who were compensated, but were unknown to us. He has identified dozens of such cases for the Registry over the past several years.

All told, the National Registry of Exonerations recorded 3,767 exonerations in the United States from 1989 through the end of 2025, and 3,792 at the time of this report. Because of the frequency at which we add exonerations to our database, this figure will soon be out of date.

EXONERATIONS BY JURISDICTION

In 2025, there were 97 exonerations in 30 states and one from federal court (Table 2). Illinois had the most exonerations (17), followed by Texas (11). Ohio had 9. New York and Michigan each had 7.

Table 2: Exonerations in 2025 by Jurisdiction (n=97)

Alaska—1	Indiana—1	New Jersey—1	Pennsylvania—4
California—2	Kentucky—1	New Mexico—2	Rhode Island—1
Colorado—2	Louisiana—1	New York—7	South Carolina—2
Connecticut—1	Maryland—2	North Carolina—1	South Dakota—1
Florida—1	Massachusetts—6	Ohio—9	Tennessee—4
Georgia—1	Michigan—7	Oklahoma—1	Texas—11
Illinois—17	Minnesota—3	Oregon—3	Virginia—1
Federal (TX)—1	Nevada—1		Wisconsin—1

As in previous years, a few states accounted for more than half of the total exonerations. Illinois regained the top spot, which it has held for six of the last seven years. While drug crime exonerations were the primary reason in prior years, 11 (65%) of the 17 Illinois exonerations in 2025 were in homicide cases. Thirteen of the 17 exonerations were in Cook County, and eight of those involved corrupt former Chicago police detective Reynaldo Guevara. Since 2004, 55 exonerations have been tied to Guevara's misconduct, which included

using physical abuse to extract false confessions from suspects or false accusations from witnesses.

Similarly, five of the 11 exonerations in Texas were tied to the misconduct of Gerald Goines, a former narcotics officer with the Houston Police Department. A total of 38 exonerations in the Registry are the result of Goines's misconduct.

LONG-TERM TRENDS

As of April 6, 2026, the Registry added 97 exonerations that occurred in 2025. This is the lowest yearly total in any of our annual reports since 2013, when we reported 87 exonerations. The total for 2025 will undoubtedly increase as we discover exonerations we don't yet know about. When the 2024 annual report was published in April 2025, we reported 147 exonerations for 2024. Since then, we have added eleven more 2024 exonerations that we didn't know about at the time of that report's publication. Exoneration totals have fluctuated like this before. As we have explained in prior years, peaks have been driven by clusters of drug exonerations. The biggest was in 2022, with 105 drug crime exonerations in a single year, 99 of them in Cook County, Illinois. These drug crime cases involved more than 200 people who had been falsely convicted of possessing drugs and weapons that had been planted by Chicago Police Sergeant Ronald Watts and his fellow officers.

In 2024, a smaller group of drug crime exonerations (17) occurred in Harris County, Texas (Houston), pushing Texas to the top of the list for that year. Prior to that, the last time Texas had the most exonerations in a single year was 2016, which capped a four-year period when nearly 140 defendants were cleared of drug possession convictions after the Harris County CIU discovered that scores of people had pled guilty to drug possession charges before lab results came back showing that what they had possessed were not, in fact, controlled substances.

While drug exonerations explain much of the year-to-year variability in the number of exonerations in the past, homicide still remains the largest category of exonerations in the Registry, with 40% of the total (1,535/3,792) as of the date of this report, and nearly half (49%) of the non-drug crime exonerations.

And while homicide exonerations dipped in 2025, these high-stakes, work-intensive cases still constituted more than half of all exonerations in 2025 (51/97).

The work of professional exonerators—CIUs and IOs—continues even as overall numbers are down. More than half (56/97) of the exonerations in 2025 involved work by CIUs or IOs, with both being involved in eight of those exonerations.

FEATURED EXONERATIONS



GREGORIO CARDONA, ROBERT CARDONA, LOWELL HIGGINS-BEY, FERNANDO GOMEZ, MICHAEL MCCASTLE, HARRY RODRIGUEZ

State: Illinois
Crime: Murder/Burglary/Home Invasion
Convicted: 1988/1989
Exonerated: 2025

Contributing Factors:
False Confession, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct

Gregorio Cardona and five other men—his brother, Robert Cardona, Fernando Gomez, Lowell Higgins-Bey, Michael McCastle and Harry Rodriguez—are among more than 50 individuals who were wrongly convicted based on misconduct by Chicago police detective Reynaldo Guevara and his partner, Ernest Halvorsen, and in some cases, other detectives. The misconduct

included coercing false confessions through violence and coercing false identifications from witnesses. The six men were convicted of crimes ranging from burglary to murder in the 1987 slaying of a man who was found bound and stabbed more than 40 times on the north side of Chicago. In addition to the evidence of police corruption, DNA testing excluded all of them from a DNA profile found on the murder weapons. Combined, they had served more than 110 years in prison. Rodriguez was exonerated posthumously because he had died in prison.

SUBRAMANYAM VEDAM

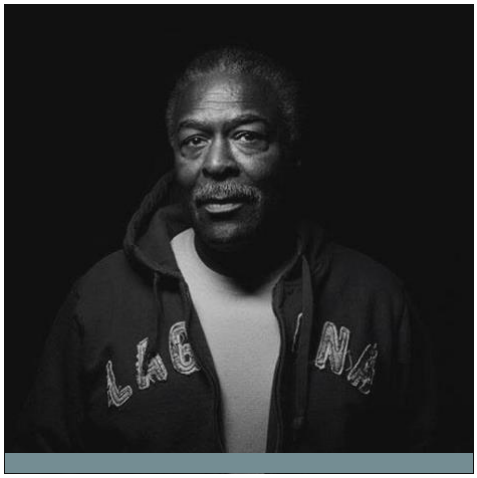


State: Pennsylvania
Crime: Murder
Convicted: 1983
Exonerated: 2025

Contributing Factors: False or Misleading Forensic Evidence, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct

Twice, in 1983 and 1988, Subramanyam “Subu” Vedam was convicted by juries in central Pennsylvania of murder in the death of a friend, whose body was found in 1981 on the outskirts of State College. He was exonerated on October 2, 2025, after his legal team uncovered impeachment evidence against a key witness and mistakes by the state’s forensic witness in his analysis of the victim’s bullet wounds. Vedam spent more than 40 years in prison. Despite his exoneration, Vedam, who was 64 years old at the time of his release, was taken immediately into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, based on a 1988 detainer issued at the time of his conviction. He was then transferred to a processing center to await deportation to his native India. In February 2026, the U.S. Department of Justice Board of Immigration Appeals vacated the 1998 deportation order. The ruling restored Vedam's permanent U.S. residency and paved the way for a new hearing.

SHERMAN TOWNSEND



Crime: Burglary
Convicted: 1998
Exonerated: 2025

Contributing Factors: Perjury or False Accusation, Inadequate Legal Defense

No physical evidence connected Sherman Townsend to a home invasion in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The people inside the house couldn't identify him, but a man in the neighborhood told police he was certain that Townsend was the person he saw running from the house. Townsend turned down a plea deal and was convicted in 1998. Later, in prison, he ran into the person who identified him. The man said he had falsely named Townsend to confuse the police because he was the real perpetrator. After an investigation, Townsend was released from prison in 2007 on time served. The Minnesota Board of Pardons gave him a full pardon on July 9, 2025.

RAYMOND GAINES



State: Massachusetts
Crime: Murder/Robbery
Convicted: 1976
Exonerated: 2025

Contributing Factors: Mistaken Witness Identification, False Confession, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct

Raymond Gaines was convicted in 1976 of the robbery and murder of a shoe repair shop owner in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. He fought for decades to overturn his conviction and was finally released on bond in 2021. Gaines had served nearly 45 years in prison. In 2022, his convictions

were vacated based on recantations by two prosecution witnesses as well as newly discovered evidence of misconduct by one of the detectives in the case. The prosecution dismissed the charges in October 2025.

PATIENCE FRAZIER



State: Nevada
Crime: Manslaughter
Convicted: 2019
Exonerated: 2025

Contributing Factors: False Confession, False or Misleading Forensic Evidence, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct, Inadequate Legal Defense

Patience Frazier pled guilty to manslaughter after she was charged with inducing an abortion by taking drugs in Humboldt County, Nevada, in 2019. Although the prosecution promised to seek probation, the judge sentenced her to 2½ to eight years in prison. In 2021, her conviction was vacated by a different judge following testimony at a hearing that indicated it was impossible to say there were signs of life after birth. In addition, an expert in addiction medicine said there was no evidence to support the claim that any of Frazier's behaviors had caused a stillbirth. The case remained pending for four years before the judge finally dismissed it in April 2025. The judge said he believed "that there has been a miscarriage of justice," and declared, "Patience has been portrayed as an antichrist, but this judge thinks she is, instead, just a mother caught hopelessly in the web of poverty with lack of any support system."

2025 GROUPS REGISTRY CASE: ILLINOIS

State: Illinois
Crimes: Traffic offenses
Number of Defendants in Group: 18

Contributing Factors: False or Misleading Forensic Evidence

In January 2025, prosecutors in DuPage County, Illinois, dismissed 18 convictions for driving under the influence of marijuana after learning of problems with the testing done by the forensic laboratory that processed drug tests collected from the defendants. Although Illinois legalized marijuana in 2019, it is still illegal to drive under the influence of marijuana. While police commonly use a Breathalyzer to measure a motorist's blood-alcohol content, no such simple test exists for marijuana. The analyst at the lab used by DuPage County said that testing urine would give an accurate reading of whether a person had recently used marijuana, but other experts refuted her conclusions and said that the presence of marijuana derivatives in a person's urine did not indicate when a person had used the drug.