



PENNSYLVANIA
INNOCENCE
PROJECT

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



The power of hope.



DORIS DELTOSTO BROGAN, BOARD PRESIDENT

The power of resilience. The power of courage. The power of connection. The power of hard work. The power of community. The power of people working together to unlock the truth and free the innocent.

In the pages of this report, you will see the impact of this kind of power. You will read about five clients who came home in 2023. Five innocent people who spent a combined 106 years in prison for crimes they did not commit. In each case, it took years to bring the client home. LaFaye Gaskins, for example, was incarcerated for 20 years already when the Project opened our doors in 2009. He was among the first to write to us, asking for help.

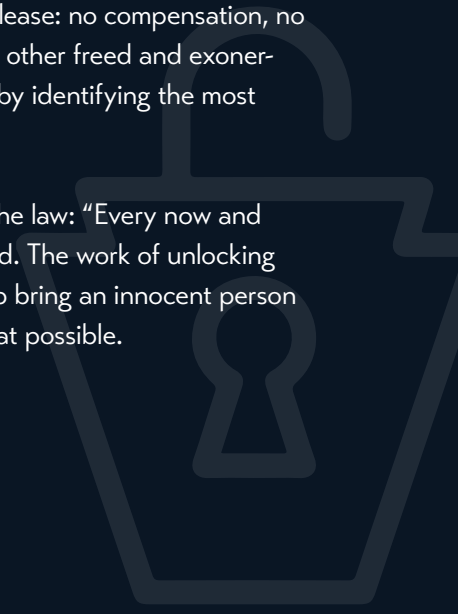
But also, in each case, it took people: the families who believed in them; the lawyers who advocated for them; the professionals who counseled them; and, most important, the innocent people

themselves who never lost hope, and had the courage to proclaim their innocence and fight for their freedom. When I hear the stories of our clients—those who have come home and those who continue their fight—I am in awe: of their bravery, their optimism, their grace, their resilience, and the power of their fight.

The story doesn't end when our clients come home. We offer support as they transition from incarceration—because the system that wrongfully convicted them provides nothing upon their release: no compensation, no job training, no transitional counseling. Part of that support comes from clients and other freed and exonerated people who offer perspective an “outsider” can't, and help inform our efforts by identifying the most crucial needs.

In the movie “Philadelphia,” Tom Hanks' character describes what he loves about the law: “Every now and again...you get to be a part of justice being done. That really is quite a thrill.” Indeed. The work of unlocking the truth is hard. It takes a long time, and it takes a lot of people. But when we help bring an innocent person home, well, that really is quite a thrill. We thank each of you for helping to make that possible.

Doris DelTosto Brogan
BOARD PRESIDENT



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IMPACT

Since our founding in 2009

30

innocent people freed
and exonerated



700

years lost to
wrongful conviction

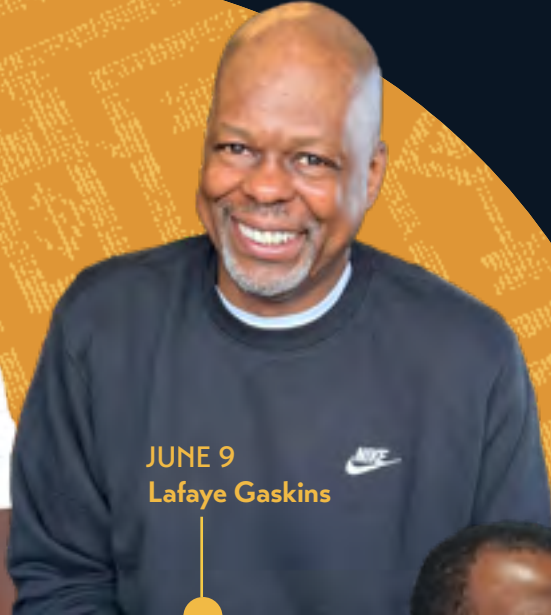
22.5

average number of years
of wrongful incarceration

2023: CELEBRATING FIVE HOMECOMINGS



JUNE 8
William Johnson



JUNE 9
Lafaye Gaskins



NOVEMBER 6
David Sparks



NOVEMBER 30
Eddie Ramirez



DECEMBER 19
C.J. Rice

LEGAL SERVICES

We welcomed five clients home in 2023 and resolved five cases through exonerations or pleas.

Together, these clients lost more than 100 years of their lives to wrongful convictions.

In June, **William Johnson** and **LaFaye Gaskins** returned home to Philadelphia just one day apart from one another. William, a children's book author, stayed connected to his family while incarcerated in part by writing stories for his niece. LaFaye, a proud father, was welcomed home by his devoted mother and his daughter, born just before he was incarcerated and recently honorably discharged from the US Navy.

By the end of November, **David Sparks** and **Eddie Ramirez** also walked free. Eddie, an advocate and artist, and David, a father who came home to his first chance to see his daughter outside of prison walls, were both teenagers at the time of the crimes for which they were wrongfully convicted. As December began, **C.J. Rice's** conviction was overturned and we welcomed him home on bail as he awaited final resolution in his case.

We achieved progress in these cases in part because of our collaborative relationship with the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. Across the Commonwealth, we had evidentiary hearings, successful appeals, and other progress in several more cases involving forensic science, including Derrick Chappell's highly publicized Delaware County case.



Larry Curley, home on parole since 2017, also saw resolution of his case in 2023.

POST-RELEASE SERVICES

We supported clients through re-entry and beyond with practical services and opportunities for meaningful connections.

We are proud to support the great courage, strength, and resilience that clients demonstrate in the search for justice and healing when they return home. Our reentry community has grown to include more than **40 freed and exonerated people** across Pennsylvania.

- In the fall of 2023, we re-launched our internship partnership with the University of Pittsburgh Masters in Social Work program, enhancing support for freed and exonerated clients across Pennsylvania.
- Our biweekly support group connects clients both in person and remotely by meeting in Philadelphia with video calling.



Above: This year, we held our first annual fall gathering for clients, families, and friends in the Philadelphia area. We are grateful for contributions from volunteers and community groups for this special event!

Top: Lance Felder and Kenya Evans at our annual Philadelphia event.

Pro Bono & Corporate Partners

We could not do our work without the support of our community and volunteers!

Partnering firms and corporations are listed below.

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4,200

Our pro bono partners donated more than 4,200 hours of legal services this year, valued at nearly **\$2.7 million.**

We thank all volunteers and partnering firms, corporations, and non-profit organizations for your invaluable support!

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Our internship program continued to assist clients while giving invaluable experience to students.

We have provided clinical training and supervised internships to more than 1,400 students, including students from every law school in Pennsylvania.

- In 2023, our staff and clients **spoke at more than 20 events**, including the Rutgers Law Review Symposium, Philadelphia City Council, and the Innocence Network Conference.
- We were proud to host the Innocence Network Northeast Regional Summit in Philadelphia this summer, **sharing best practices with colleagues across the region** and building the strength of the innocence community.

For our Pittsburgh event this fall, former interns shared their reflections on their work with us. "Working for the Pennsylvania Innocence Project was undoubtedly the most significant and impactful experience of my law school career," says one past intern and current Project supporter. "Through this opportunity I was able to gain firsthand insight into the harsh realities faced by individuals who have been wrongfully convicted. Innocent individuals, already burdened by their wrongful convictions, are forced to navigate a complex and unforgiving legal landscape. **Witnessing these injustices solidified my determination to advocate for change.**"

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University of Pittsburgh and the School of Law

Villanova University and the Charles Widger School of Law

Widener University

We are grateful to our partners who send legal, social work, and undergraduate interns to us to experience innocence work.



NEW JUSTICE FELLOWS This year our legal team welcomed Justice Fellows Alyra Parker and Jonah Rosenbaum in a new program launched with funding from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.



Above: Tyrone Jones, David Bryant, and Larry "Trent" Roberts at our annual Philadelphia event. COLIBRI WORKSHOP



"Thank you to all of you who are a part of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project, for giving so generously of your time and expertise. Thank you for providing the wrongfully convicted with hope when there is often only despair."

APRIL BARTON

Dean of the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Duquesne University at our annual Pittsburgh event on October 25, 2023

COMMUNITY & ADVOCACY

We made strides in 2023 toward raising public awareness of the issues surrounding wrongful convictions—and on the policy advocacy front.

Preventing false confessions

A bill that would mandate the electronic recording of custodial interrogations for serious crimes across Pennsylvania was [introduced in the state Senate as SB717](#) and in fall 2023 we briefed the bipartisan Criminal Justice Reform Caucus on the legislation. If passed, the bill will mean that a clear record is made of interrogations, which has the dual benefit of protecting law enforcement officers against false claims of abuse and reducing the number of false confessions.

Raising awareness through music

On [Wrongful Conviction Day](#) in October 2023, Grammy Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning artist Rhiannon Giddens released a music video featuring 22 Pennsylvania Innocence Project clients. “My hope is to shine a light on incarcerated voices and a system of societal violence,” she said, “and to educate audiences on how to help.” Watch and learn more at [PAinnocence.info](#).

Right: Rhiannon Giddens on the her music video set with two of the 22 Pennsylvania Innocence Project clients featured.

COLIBRI WORKSHOP

“My hope is to shine a light on incarcerated voices and a system of societal violence, and to educate audiences on how to help.”

—RHIANNON GIDDENS
Grammy Award and Pulitzer Prize winning musician



“Once you grab people’s attention with innocence, they’re able to open their minds to all sorts of other issues in the system.”

—REBECCA BROWN, Outgoing Director of Policy for the Innocence Project in New York, shown here with Leigh Skipper at our annual celebration event in Philadelphia, where both received awards.

Financial Health and Sustainability

OUR 2023 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



PENNSYLVANIA
INNOCENCE
PROJECT



Pro Bono Contributions

In 2023, volunteer law firm and corporate law department staff contributed more than **4,200 pro bono hours** to the Project, **valued at nearly \$2.7 million**. Our pro bono partners are vital to the Project and to our clients.

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Donte Rollins with Project staff during the filming for a Rhiannon Giddens music video. CREDIT: COLIBRI WORKSHOP





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