



A Neutral, Fact-Finding State Agency

Charged with Investigating Post-Conviction Claims of Innocence

NCIIC Newsletter

Welcome

Welcome to the [North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission's](#) (NCIIC) first quarterly newsletter! The Commission is an independent, neutral state agency tasked with investigating claims of innocence by individuals who have been convicted of certain crimes in North Carolina. It is the only state agency of its kind in the entire county. This year marks 15 years of the Commission being in operation and we have created this newsletter to give insight into our operations and accomplishments.

Over 15 years, the Commission has received over 3,200 claims of factual innocence. In 2021 alone, the Commission received 268 claims of factual innocence. All claims go through an investigative process that determines whether the claim meets the Commission's statutory requirements and whether there is new, credible, and verifiable evidence of innocence.

Case Outcomes

The Commission has completed its investigations and closed over 97% of the claims it has received. During its 15 years in operation, the Commission has presented 19 cases at a Commission hearing. 15 individuals have been exonerated through the Commission's process or as a result of the Commission's investigations.

What people might not know about the Commission is that the session law that created the Commission indicated that its purpose was to ensure that the innocent as well as the guilty receive justice. Since it began operating, the Commission has *confirmed* guilt in 10 cases, usually through DNA testing. DNA testing has also led to the identification of either the true perpetrator or additional perpetrators in several of our cases.

Staff and Investigations

Each year, the Commission will investigate continuing claims from years before and receive new claims. The Commission has been working to increase efficiency and streamline processes since 2016. The Commission strives to have all cases investigated to completion within three years. While every case is different and requires varying levels of investigation, we feel confident in our ability to continue investigating cases in a thorough *and* efficient manner.

While the Commission has worked to increase efficiency in the past few years, this came at the cost of significant overtime work by staff and a heavy reliance on interns and volunteers. Commission leadership worked diligently in 2021 to get its budget expansion request in the final General Assembly budget. Those efforts

paid off and, much to our great appreciation, the General Assembly and Governor agreed with the Commission's need for a budget expansion. This expansion included four additional full-time positions, operating expenses, and funding for our Victim Services Program. We are thrilled to have received this expansion that will allow us to continue to be a leader in innovative criminal justice reform. The Commission now has four permanently funded investigator-attorneys and two investigator-attorneys funded by federal grants for post-conviction DNA testing, allowing us to continue to investigate our cases thoroughly and efficiently.

A significant number of Commission cases involve DNA testing. To offset the costs of DNA testing and have dedicated staff investigating DNA cases, the Commission began applying for federal postconviction testing of DNA evidence grants. The Commission has continuously received funding under this program since receiving its first post-conviction DNA testing assistance grant in 2009. The Commission has been awarded six grants and was recently awarded with a seventh grant which runs October 1, 2022 through September 2025. To date, the Commission has received over \$3.5 million in grant funding under this program!

Victim Services Program

The Commission received a grant from Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) in October 2019 to implement a Victim Services Program to support the next of kin, secondary victims, or original victims of crimes investigated by the Commission. This VOCA grant allowed the Commission to hire a Victim Services Coordinator, provide victim-centered training to Commission staff, and develop an education program related to post-conviction Victim services. In 2018 and 2019, 22% of victims contacted by the Commission responded. In 2020 and 2021 after the program began, 77% of victims responded to Commission contact and made use of the information and services offered. This grant was extended and expired at the end of September 2022.



The Commission received an extension on its 2019 grant in early 2022. The Commission also applied for and received an additional VOCA grant in 2022 to fund a partnership with the national nonprofit [Healing Justice](#). Through this partnership, the Commission will be able to offer restorative justice processes to crime victims involved in our cases. These grants and the budget expansion will allow the Commission to continue to develop this innovative and essential program to support victims in our cases.

15-year Anniversary Celebration

In honor of this significant anniversary, the Commission is planning a celebration at the N.C. State Alumni Club on October 26, 2022. We expect to welcome current and former Commissioners and staff, exonerees, and other stakeholders in the Commission process. [Chief Justice Paul Newby](#) has issued a [proclamation](#) naming October 24-28 as "Innocence Inquiry Commission Week" for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) to mark the occasion. Stay tuned for more details in our next newsletter!



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THE NORTH CAROLINA INNOCENCE INQUIRY COMMISSION

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