

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF FORSYTH


IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE  
SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

02 CRS 38884

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

v.

NATHANIEL CAUTHEN

FILED  
2020 MAR 18 A 8:19  
FORSYTH CO., C.S.C.  
BY 

**OPINION**

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**THIS MATTER** came on for hearing before the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission (Commission) on March 9, 2020 through March 13, 2020 pursuant to N.C.G.S. §§ 15A-1460 – 1475. After careful review of the evidence presented, the Commission hereby makes and enters the following findings of fact:

1. On November 15, 2002, Nathaniel Jones was robbed and murdered at his home.
2. On August 18, 2004, Nathaniel Cauthen (Cauthen) was found guilty, after a jury trial, of First Degree Murder and Robbery with a Dangerous Weapon. He received a sentence of life without the possibility of parole, but was later resentenced to life with the possibility of parole. Cauthen remains in custody.
3. On April 4, 2018, Cauthen applied to the Commission claiming innocence in this case and the Commission began an inquiry pursuant to Article 92, Chapter 15A, of the General Statutes.
4. Throughout the Commission's inquiry, Cauthen has fully cooperated with Commission staff in accordance with N.C.G.S. § 15A-1467(g).
5. On March 9, 2020 through March 13, 2020, the Commission held a full evidentiary hearing in this matter pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 15A-1468.
6. During the hearing, the Commission considered testimonial and documentary evidence. The evidence included, among other things:

- a. A 2233 page brief provided to the Commission by the Commission's Director prior to the hearing;
  - b. Supplemental documentation, in the form of handouts, a PowerPoint presentation, and audio and video recordings provided prior to and during the hearing;
  - c. Live testimony by Commission Staff Attorney Julie Bridenstine; Commission Legal Investigator Mackenzie Myers; Commission Associate Director Beth Tanner; Commission Grant Staff Attorney Catherine Matoian; latent print expert Christopher Cavazos; footwear impression expert Marty Ludas; forensic biology expert Meghan Clement; juvenile interrogations, confessions and psychology expert Dr. Hayley Cleary; Jessicah Black; Detective Jason Swaim; Arlene Tolliver (phone); claimant Jermal Tolliver; claimant Rayshawn Banner; claimant Nathaniel Cauthen; and claimant Christopher Bryant;
  - d. Affidavits from attorneys Vernetta Alston; Barbara Blackman; Haral Carlin; George "Pete" Clary; Nils Gerber; Rick Glazier; Teresa Hier; Paul Herzog; Kevin Mauney; Beth McNeill; and James Parish.
7. After carefully considering this evidence, the Commission has concluded by a vote of 5 to 3 that there is sufficient evidence of factual innocence to merit judicial review.

**WHEREFORE**, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 15A-1468(c), and as Chair of the Commission, the undersigned refers this case to the Honorable L. Todd Burke, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge for Judicial District 21, and respectfully requests that the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court appoint a three-judge panel and issue commissions to its members to convene a special session of Superior Court of Forsyth County to hear evidence relevant to the Commission's recommendation.

This the 13th day of March, 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom H. Lock', written over a horizontal line.

The Honorable Thomas H. Lock  
Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, District 11B  
Alternate Chair, North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

The undersigned hereby certifies that the foregoing *Opinion* was served upon the following persons by depositing a copy of the same, postage pre-paid, in an official depository of the United States Postal Service, addressed as follows:

The Honorable L. Todd Burke  
Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, District 21  
Forsyth County Courthouse  
PO Box 20099  
Winston-Salem, NC 27120

The Honorable James O'Neill  
District Attorney, Judicial District 21  
200 N Main Street  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

Ms. Julie Boyer  
Attorney at Law  
PO Box 21358  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

This the 10<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2020.

**NORTH CAROLINA INNOCENCE  
INQUIRY COMMISSION**



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Executive Director  
North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission  
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