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Oklahoma Man Exonerated with Help from Innocence Project
Oklahoma Innocence Project Marks First Year by Attending the Hearing in Tulsa County

(OKLAHOMA CITY – August 2, 2012) – Oklahoma City University School of Law’s Oklahoma Innocence Project (OIP) Director, Tiffany Murphy, and three summer interns were invited by the Innocence Project (New York) to attend the exoneration hearing for Sedrick Courtney. Courtney is an Oklahoman who was convicted of armed robbery and first-degree burglary in 1996. In June he was paroled after serving 16 years of his 30-year sentence. At a hearing in July, the Tulsa County District Attorney announced that his conviction should be vacated based on DNA evidence.

Innocence Project Co-Director Barry Scheck invited the OIP to attend Courtney’s hearing as a reminder of the on-going efforts by the Project to evaluate post-conviction claims of innocence.

The OIP opened in August 2011 with hundreds of requests from inmates for a review of their case. A total of 627 requests have been received by the Project. Of those, close to half have been closed and the remaining 326 are in various stages of review, including 18 that are currently being investigated and developed by students under the direction of Professor Murphy.

Like the Innocence Project, which was founded in 1992 at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University, the Oklahoma Innocence Project at Oklahoma City University School of Law seeks to identify and rectify wrongful convictions. Unlike the Innocence Project in New York, the OIP will take any case where there is credible evidence of a wrongful conviction, not just DNA cases.

The Innocence Project (New York) took Courtney’s case back in 2007 and five years later his conviction was vacated. Professor Murphy says this is not uncommon as cases move through the justice system.

“On average it takes between five and seven years for a case to go from review to exoneration, and it can take even longer if there is no biological evidence to test,” said Murphy. “The process is lengthened by the time necessary to review the case, find the records, review the records, conduct witness interviews and then the litigation. It just doesn’t happen overnight, even when the evidence is overwhelming.”

The students who participate in the Project gain hands-on experience working with clients, while learning about the inner-workings of the criminal justice system. Under the supervision of Murphy, they unite their knowledge, skills and passion for justice in work that is real and potentially life changing for a wrongfully convicted inmate.
To learn more about the Oklahoma Innocence Project, go to innocence.okcu.edu. If you would like to get involved, there are two ways you can help. To volunteer, please send an email to innocence@okcu.edu. If you would like to support the work of the project financially, please visit innocence.okcu.edu and click on the donate tab.

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