

CHAMPION OF INNOCENCE

Maddy deLone,* Meredith Kennedy,** &
Barry Scheck***

It has been our pleasure to work alongside Dean Larry Hellman over the years, particularly in the context of his work as founder of the Oklahoma Innocence Project, and to call him our friend. Leveraging his then-role as Dean of the Oklahoma City University School of Law and his many personal and community connections, Dean Hellman raised a significant amount of money to start an innocence clinic at OCU nine years ago. And thanks to his deep commitment to the cause, his insistence that he needed to raise funds to make the program sustainable, and his tireless fundraising efforts, the Oklahoma Innocence Project opened in 2010 with enough money to keep it in operation for at least five years.

When the project launched, Dean Hellman was its first executive director. He remained in that position for five years, including after he transitioned from his long-tenured role as Dean of OCU Law. From those early days, Dean Hellman pushed to make the project the very best it could be. He recognized the importance of a client-centered approach. He also always strove to uplift the voices and experiences of exonerated people, bringing dozens of them together at Oklahoma Innocence Project fundraising events so they could connect with one another and share their stories with the project's supporters.

Dean Hellman was a staunch advocate for the innocent beyond his role in founding and directing the Oklahoma Innocence Project. He was a driving force in getting the state bar association to create the Oklahoma Justice Commission, which worked to reduce wrongful convictions and to ensure that people who are wrongfully convicted are adequately compensated.

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Dean Hellman was a fixture for many years at the annual Innocence Network Conference: a gathering of lawyers, exonerated people, and other innocence advocates. He and the rest of the Oklahoma Innocence Project staff would attend sessions on both legal strategy and organizational development issues as part of their commitment to making the clinic as robust and successful as possible. One year he even attended with a broken leg!

There is no question Dean Hellman is committed to and has worked tirelessly on behalf of the wrongfully convicted in Oklahoma. Today, thanks to the solid start he provided, the Oklahoma Innocence Project is a thriving legal services organization and remains a member of the international Innocence Network. It has achieved the exoneration of two incredible people, De'Marchoe Carpenter and Malcolm Scott, and has cases in active litigation. The clinic associated with the Oklahoma Innocence Project has inspired excellence in its students and encouraged a whole new generation of lawyers to take up the challenge to free those who have been wrongfully convicted and to use their skills as lawyers to pursue justice.

Dean Hellman, thank you on behalf of all of us who are part of the innocence movement for your tremendous efforts to prevent wrongful convictions in Oklahoma, and for your transformative role founding the Oklahoma Innocence Project. You are truly a beacon of justice and have helped so many over the course of your incredible career.