



THE NATIONAL REGISTRY
OF EXONERATIONS



The value of N.C.'s Innocence Commission

Last month, we published the case of [Clarence Roberts](#), who was wrongfully convicted of second-degree murder in a drive-by shooting in Lumberton, North Carolina. He was exonerated on April 16, after a three-judge panel convened through the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission ruled that Roberts had proven his actual innocence.

The commission is the only state agency in the United States whose mission is to investigate claims of innocence. Its work has led to 16 exonerations since its creation in 2006.

Roberts's exoneration was overshadowed by other news involving the commission. On the day of his exoneration, the North Carolina Senate approved a budget proposal that would eliminate the commission. (The commission's budget is about \$1.6 **million** out of a total state budget of \$30 **billion**.) One senator said the commission was no longer needed because defendants seeking post-conviction relief had sufficient avenues through the courts as well as the assistance of outside organizations to help in their cases.

Roberts might disagree. His case was built on circumstantial evidence, with no witnesses identifying him as the shooter. Prior to the commission's investigation and the judicial ruling of actual innocence, an appellate panel had affirmed his conviction, brushing aside Roberts's claims of procedural errors and saying there was overwhelming evidence of his guilt.



Clarence Roberts, second from right, with his attorney, Reid Cater, and his sisters, Tasha Williams, left, and Shannell Vintson.

We published 17 other exonerations in May, including one prior to 1989.

[Samuel Scott Minton](#) of Dayton, Tennessee, was convicted in 1994 of rape, robbery, and other charges. He was exonerated in 2024 after DNA testing excluded him from several pieces of evidence at the crime scene, and expert witnesses challenged the victim's account of the crime and pointed out problems with Minton's confession.

In 2023, [Kara Beaty](#) of South Bend, Indiana, was convicted of causing death or catastrophic injury when operating a motor vehicle after her car hit a motorcycle. She was exonerated in 2025, after presenting video evidence that the rider of the motorcycle, who died from his injuries, was speeding and riding recklessly in the moments before the accident.

In 2018, [Antonio Manzo-Diaz](#) was sentenced to 25 years in prison after he was convicted of child sex abuse in Wayne County, Michigan. He was exonerated in 2025 based on evidence that the allegation was false.

In 2003, [Darren Price](#) was sentenced to 49 years in prison for attempted murder, kidnapping, and robbery in Memphis, Tennessee. He was exonerated in 2025 based on DNA testing as well as witnesses who said he was elsewhere at the time of the crime.

In 2007, [Donta Jackson](#) was sentenced to 32 years in prison for a shooting in Kankakee, Illinois. He was granted a new trial, and the case was dismissed in December 2024 based on evidence that contradicted the victim's testimony that Jackson was the gunman.

[Denise Mills](#) of Houston, Texas, pled guilty to a drug offense in 2014. She was exonerated in 2025 after the officer involved in her arrest was tied to misconduct in other cases.

[Calvin Reed](#) of Houston, Texas, pled guilty in 2008 to sexual assault of a child. He was exonerated in 2023 after the victim recanted her allegations and said her foster mother's husband was the real perpetrator.

In 1992, [Jerry Herrington](#) was sentenced to 60 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois when he was 16 years old. He was exonerated in 2025 based on evidence that police physically abused him until he falsely confessed, that the only witness who identified him had recanted, and that several new witnesses identified the real gunman.

In 1993, [Michael Mendoza](#) was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Providence, Rhode Island. He was granted a new trial, and the case was dismissed in March 2025 based on his defense lawyer's failure to expose the sole witness's pending charges and use of false names and dates of birth.

In 2012, [James Garner](#) was sentenced to 36 years in prison in Denver, Colorado, for a shooting in a bar that injured two men. He was exonerated in 2025 based on new evidence that cast doubt on the identifications of Garner by the victims, and testimony from a new witness who said he was with Garner when the shooting occurred.

In 2019, [Travis Cobb](#) was sentenced to 25 years in prison for aggravated robbery in San Antonio, Texas. He was exonerated in 2025 based on DNA evidence that led to the identification of the real criminal.

[Humberto Duran](#) was convicted of murder and attempted murder in Los Angeles County, California in 1994. He was exonerated in 2024 and received a finding of actual innocence in 2025 after the state's eyewitness recanted her testimony, and his attorneys uncovered other substantial problems with his conviction and the representation he received at trial.

In 2019, [Jerry Sims Jr.](#) was convicted of a murder and related arson in East Cleveland, Ohio. He was exonerated in 2025 after the state's main witness said she falsely testified against Sims because of her relationship with a police officer investigating the case.

[Scott Meier](#) was convicted in 2023 of second-degree rape in King County, Washington. He was exonerated in November 2024 after the victim, the young daughter of his former girlfriend, recanted her accusation.

In 2016, [Robert Kaiser](#) was sentenced to 20 years in prison after he was convicted of murder in the death of his infant son in Stearns County, Minnesota. He was granted a new trial based on evidence that some of the medical testimony that a triad of medical symptoms indicated abuse was incorrect. In May 2025, Kaiser was acquitted at a retrial after the defense presented evidence that there was no evidence of abuse.

In 2003, [Sandeep "Sonny" Bharadia](#) was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a burglary and sexual assault in Thunderbolt, Georgia. He was exonerated in 2025 after DNA testing identified his co-defendant as the true perpetrator.

In 1981, [Robert Grover](#) was convicted of second-degree robbery in King County, Washington. He was exonerated in 1982 after it was discovered that state's main witness had been using drugs at the time of her identification.

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