



# INNOCENT LIVES AT RISK

The death penalty carries the inherent risk of executing an innocent person.

Since the death penalty was reinstated in Ohio, eleven people have been sentenced to death only to be later exonerated. This means that for every five executions in our state, one person has been exonerated.



*“When the state executes an innocent person, the mistake is irreversible.”*

**JOE D'AMBROSIO**  
**140TH DEATH ROW EXONEREE**

Nationally, we know of at least 190 people who have been freed after evidence revealed they were sentenced to die for crimes they did not commit.

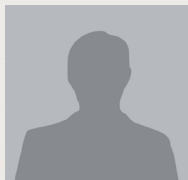
Ohio death row exonerees spent an average of more than 20 years between conviction and exoneration, and combined, they served almost 216 years incarcerated for crimes they did not commit.

These wrongful convictions rob innocent people of decades of their lives, waste tax dollars, and retraumatize the victims' families, while the people responsible remain unaccountable.

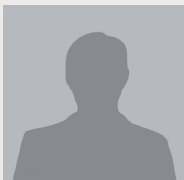
## OHIO'S DEATH ROW EXONEREES



**Gary Beeman**,  
exonerated in 1979,  
three years after  
his conviction in  
Ashtabula County.



**Thomas Pearson**,  
exonerated in 1980,  
four years after  
his conviction in  
Cuyahoga County.



**Charles Tolliver**,  
exonerated in 1988,  
two years after  
his conviction in  
Cuyahoga County.



**Dale Johnston**,  
exonerated in  
1990, two years  
after his conviction  
in Hocking County.



**Gary Lamar James and Timothy Howard**, co-defendants exonerated in 2003, 27 years after their conviction in Franklin County.



**Derrick Jamison**,  
exonerated in  
2005, 20 years after  
his conviction in  
Hamilton County.



**Joe D'Ambrosio**,  
exonerated in  
2012, 23 years after  
his conviction in  
Cuyahoga County.



**Rickey Jackson, Wiley Bridgeman, and Kwame Ajamu**,  
co-defendants exonerated in 2014, 39 years after their  
conviction in Cuyahoga County.



## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM DNA

A common myth about wrongful convictions is that DNA is always available and accurate for testing. It's true that hundreds of DNA exonerations reveal that murder cases are often riddled with problems:

- Coerced confessions and other official misconduct
- Mistaken eyewitnesses
- Incompetent lawyers
- Junk forensics
- Unreliable jailhouse informants

Unfortunately, DNA cannot solve these problems, it can only tell us how bad they are. DNA evidence exists in just 5-10% of criminal cases.

Many states, including Ohio, have tried to address these problems with reforms, increasing both financial costs and human resources, but none of them have been able to overcome human error or misconduct.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT APPEALS

The appeals process is not designed to catch many of these mistakes. Most exonerations come only because of the extraordinary efforts of people working *outside* the system – pro bono lawyers, family members, even students. Innocent people in Ohio have spent up to 39 years awaiting execution, or come within hours of execution, before the truth came to light. Any effort to streamline the death penalty process or cut appeals will only increase the risk that an innocent person will be executed.

## THE ROLE OF RACE IN WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

Since race plays a central role in the criminal justice system, it is not surprising that it is also central to the problem of wrongful convictions. According to a report by the National Registry of Exonerations (NRE), most of the exonerations in the United States in the past 28 years have been of black defendants. The NRE report further states that black people convicted of murder are 50 percent more likely to be innocent than white people convicted of murder and that black people are more likely to be wrongly convicted of murder when the victim was white.

These findings are consistent with Ohio's experience. While people of color make up less than 15% of Ohio's population, they make up 56% of Ohio's death row, 33% of those executed, and 72% of those exonerated.

Official misconduct involving evidence is a major contributor to racial disparity in death row exonerations. According to the NRE, 93 innocent defendants were sentenced to death at least in part because of official misconduct.

## A RISK TOO HIGH

Growing awareness of the risk of executing the innocent has shifted American's views on the death penalty. For the first time since 1985, an annual national Gallup poll showed a majority of Americans prefer life imprisonment over the death penalty. That's a 15 percentage point shift in just the last five years.

**Clearly, the risk is too high. It's time to abandon the death penalty in Ohio.**