

Chicago Police Abuse Victim to be Released Today Innocent Man to be Released After 26 Years of Wrongful Incarceration

Cook County Jail, 2650 S. California Ave, Chicago – After obtaining a new trial based on new evidence of innocence in late April, prosecutors today dismissed the charges against Exoneration Project client Patrick Prince. He will be freed today after 26 years of wrongful conviction. He is 46 years old.

Patrick Prince was convicted of a 1991 homicide based solely on a confession coerced by Detective Kriston Kato. The “confession” was the only evidence offered at trial implicating Prince, who has consistently maintained his innocence for twenty-six years. Since then, scores of people have claimed that Kato beat or coerced them in his efforts to obtain witness statements of confession. Many of these individuals were either never charged, acquitted, or had their convictions overturned in the Courts.

At the recent hearing, along with eyewitness testimony that had never been presented, the Exoneration Project presented the Court with 24 of the pattern evidence concerning Detective Kato. Detective Kato also testified and was thoroughly impeached. When asked whether he would solve crimes “by any means necessary,” Kato stated plainly: “That was my job.” Indeed, history makes clear that Kato would use any means—including force, deceit, and coercion to “solve” cases by getting confessions.

As the Judge wrote in his April 26 order, the new evidence presented by the Exoneration Project at the hearing “seriously call[s] into question the vitality and fidelity” of Prince’s conviction, “given the disparities, inconsistencies and newly discovered evidence.” The Court also refused to turn a blind eye to what we now know about false confessions, saying: “This is a case that arose during the times, thinking, sentiments, customs and practices of the 1990s. Petitioner was just 19 years old. There were no eyewitnesses to the actual shooting that testified at trial. No physical evidence connected Petitioner to the crime. No forensic evidence connects Petitioner to the crime. The only evidence against the Petitioner was his confession. Allegations and findings of past misconduct by police during questioning of suspects are now at an unprecedented high and we now better understand the psychology of false confessions. [Full Order]

The Cook County State’s attorney’s office could have elected to retry Mr. Prince, but instead dismissed the charges. The State’s decision, hopefully, reflects a welcome change to cases involving false and coerced confessions in Chicago—the false confession capital of the United States.

Patrick Prince is represented by Exoneration Project attorney David B. Owens and University of Chicago clinic students Michaela Kabat and Regina Wood.

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