mission

IPNO frees innocent people sentenced to life in prison and those serving unjust sentences. We recognize the root causes of wrongful convictions and unjust sentences as systemic racism and inequities.

We work to expose and address these root causes by sharing our clients’ stories in court, the legislature, the community and the media.

We support our clients living well and fully in the world after their release.

vision

IPNO is building an equitable, unbiased, and just criminal legal system where everyone is treated with dignity and humanity.
Letter from IPNO’s Executive Director

In this annual report, we share the stories of ten people freed by IPNO in 2023. 10 people who will again enjoy holiday meals, exchange gifts, light candles, and partake in other family traditions with their loved ones.

Of the 10 freed this year, three are factually innocent; 4 were released on parole after we pointed out their parole eligibility to the LA Department of Corrections then represented them before the Parole Board; and 3 were resentenced and released from their illegal sentences that the court, the prosecution and the defense had all overlooked. All of them would still be in prison but for the work of IPNO. IPNO is the only organization dedicated to freeing the innocent and the unjustly sentenced in Louisiana. This year our freed clients are from Jefferson, Caddo, St. Tammany, St. Mary, and Orleans parishes.

These cases continue to show how our criminal legal system over values finality over accuracy and correlates harsh punishment with safety. In each of our three innocence cases, the prosecutor hid critical, favorable evidence from our clients, hindering their respective juries from hearing all of the evidence in their cases to figure out the truth of what happened. Evidence supporting our clients’ innocence remained hidden until our recent investigation decades later.

Our resentencing cases demonstrate how Louisiana’s longtime reliance on excessive sentences to address violence and crime have led to neglect and divestment of people and communities most impacted by violence. Our client Shannon Ferguson, who was forced to represent himself at sentencing and received the maximum sentence of 60 years for possessing .03 grams of cocaine, the size of a grain of coarse sea salt, needed counseling and addiction treatment following his military service, not imprisonment. Our client Clydel Cummings never knew that painting and woodworking could be a therapeutic outlet providing him with stability and balance until he was in prison for life for drug addiction. What if he had been exposed to art therapy earlier while navigating the challenges of addiction recovery and depression? Could he have avoided a life sentence under Louisiana’s unforgiving habitual offender law?

I hope you will read about each of our clients in this report. Their stories fuel transformative change in the criminal legal system. Our clients’ cases and experiences expose the many flaws of the system that must be reimagined and rebuilt to achieve greater fairness, justice and equity.

I am grateful for your support as we close out 2023 and look forward to 2024. There is much work to be done and new challenges to be faced in the New Year.

We are ready. Always hopeful. Ever persistent.

Onward,

Jee Park , Executive Director

IPNO staff and IPNO clients on the steps of Orleans Parish Criminal District Court.
JAMES BAKER

**FREED AFTER: 23 YEARS, 6 MONTHS, AND 21 DAYS**

James Baker was convicted of possession of heroin in Jefferson Parish when he was 40 years old. He had a loving family and a job, but prosecutors used his non-violent prior convictions against him and the judge sentenced him to life in prison.

A few years later, the laws changed and his sentence became illegal, and more recently a Louisiana Supreme Court decision declared that those laws applied retroactively and that Mr. Baker and people like him were entitled to be re-sentenced. But Mr. Baker did not know about the case and didn’t have an attorney to file a motion for him asking for a new sentence. He stayed in prison for 5 more years until IPNO learned about his case and asked the court to release him. On February 2, 2023, after more than 23 years in prison, Mr. Baker was freed and welcomed home by his mother, sister, nephew and cousin.

BOBBY WALLACE

**FREED AFTER: 16 YEARS, 1 MONTH, AND 1 DAY**

Bobby Wallace received a life sentence from Caddo Parish for possession of cocaine – cocaine that was hidden in a couch cushion in someone else’s house. There was so little evidence tying Mr. Wallace to the cocaine that the members of his jury could not agree on whether he should be convicted. But in Louisiana, non-unanimous vote was enough to send him away for life.

Despite the injustice of his situation, Mr. Wallace earned multiple vocational trades, worked in the prison library, mentored others, and became a trustee. He stayed the positive, patient, funny person he was before prison. IPNO represented him before the parole board and a unanimous panel recommended his release. On June 8, 2023, Mr. Wallace was freed after 16 years. Mr. Wallace now works at a flooring company, volunteers his time at a youth organization, and has reconnected with his son who was born within days of him going to prison.
LARRY MOSES

**FREED AFTER: 28 YEARS, 11 MONTHS, AND 9 DAYS**

Larry Moses was convicted of a 1994 first-degree murder based on the testimony of one witness. He narrowly avoided the death penalty when the jury voted to give him life and not death by execution.

IPNO learned through our investigation that evidence hidden in law enforcement files showed that the State’s star witness was a liar with severe mental health problems who was likely motivated to falsely implicate Mr. Moses to the murder due to his strong, irrational personal bias against him. IPNO presented this evidence in March 2023 at a hearing in court, as well as additional support for Mr. Moses’s alibi that he was out of town when the murder occurred. On May 25, 2023, Judge Kimya Holmes of Orleans Parish vacated Mr. Moses’s conviction “due to the failures of the State and its deliberate concealment of relevant facts that were obviously material and should have been disclosed to the defendant prior to trial.” Mr. Moses was released on June 14, 2023, and fully exonerated when the State dismissed the case on July 19, 2023. Since winning his freedom, Mr. Moses has enjoyed riding the New Orleans transit bus all cross town, from Algiers Point to New Orleans East, seeing how neighborhoods have changed in the last three decades.

BERNARD FORREST

**FREED AFTER: 10 YEARS, 7 MONTHS, AND 2 DAYS**

In 2016, Bernard Forrest was sentenced to life in prison for drug offenses from St. Tammany Parish. Shortly after his sentence, the law changed and his sentence became illegal. In 2021, IPNO filed a motion laying out how the new laws applied to him and he was resentenced and immediately parole-eligible. IPNO then represented him before the Parole Board on May 17, 2023. A unanimous parole panel praised his excellent record of achievement in prison and he was released after nearly 11 years of imprisonment.

More than anything else, Mr. Forrest was motivated to be free again to be with his children, including his son who needs constant care for physical disabilities. He is now able to support them with his truck maintenance job, and is working towards building his own trucking company.
JERRY DAVIS

FREED AFTER: 40 YEARS, 1 MONTH, AND 21 DAYS

Jerry Davis was arrested in June 1983 and convicted six months later in January 1984 of first-degree murder. The prosecutor told the jury that his “plan” was to have Mr. Davis electrocuted. In furtherance of this plan, the State hid evidence that the only two witnesses to implicate Mr. Davis were perjurers who likely committed the crime themselves. Mr. Davis’s jury spared his life by voting for life in prison instead of death by execution.

After an evidentiary hearing on July 26, 2023, Judge Tracey Flemings-Davillier in Orleans Parish vacated Mr. Davis’s conviction due to the “breadth and severity” of the constitutional violations by the State to deny Mr. Davis of a fair trial where evidence of his innocence could have been presented. At 1:30 a.m. on August 10, 2023, Mr. Davis was released on a pretrial bond into the arms of his family and supporters after 40 years of wrongful imprisonment. His daughter drove through the night from Texas to surprise him the next morning. Although Mr. Davis is still under indictment for first-degree murder, IPNO hopes to secure dismissal of all pending charges and secure his full exoneration soon. Mr. Davis is a gifted craftsman and builds shrimp boat models as a hobby.

SHANNON FERGUSON

FREED AFTER: 11 YEARS, 3 MONTHS, AND 7 DAYS

Shannon Ferguson, of St. Mary Parish, was sentenced to 60 years in prison for cocaine the size of a coarse grain of salt found inside some lint in his pocket. Mr. Ferguson represented himself in this case, filing his own motions, examining witnesses, and arguing his position without the advice of counsel. When he was convicted, the trial court sentenced him to decades above the mandatory minimum sentence.

IPNO filed claims alleging that he had been improperly denied a lawyer to represent himself at sentencing. On August 18, 2023, he was resentenced and released after more than 11 years in prison. Since being released Mr. Ferguson has been focused on rebuilding his life and has been working closely with the community of formerly incarcerated people in New Orleans advocating for justice in our city and state.
RAYMOND LAUGAND

**FREED AFTER: 27 YEARS, 5 MONTHS, AND 4 DAYS**

Raymond Laugand was arrested of a 1996 shooting in the St. Bernard Housing Project. Two independent witnesses told two separate police officers who the shooters were, and Mr. Laugand was neither of them. These shooters were connected to other crimes in the area and the car used in the crime. Instead of pursuing these perpetrators, the State hid this evidence and secured a second-degree murder conviction and life sentence against Mr. Laugand based on unreliable testimony.

In May 2023, IPNO presented the evidence hidden by the State for 27 years to the Court, supporting Mr. Laugand’s innocence. The District Attorney’s Office then agreed that Mr. Laugand was entitled to have his conviction vacated because he did not receive a fair trial. On September 29, 2023, Judge Nandi Campbell of Orleans Parish vacated Mr. Laugand’s conviction and Mr. Laugand was released on October 2, 2023 on a pretrial bond. The State has yet to dismiss the murder charge against Mr. Laugand. IPNO intends to fight for Mr. Laugand’s full exoneration. Mr. Laugand is currently enrolled in a job training program, is focused on financial and digital literacy, and recently discovered Instagram.

CLYDEL CUMMINGS

**FREED AFTER: 15 YEARS AND 1 DAY**

Clydel Cummings was sentenced to life in prison for a drug offense from Caddo Parish, but that did not deter him from finding opportunities to learn and to create. While in prison, he participated in many rehabilitative programs, mentored other incarcerated people, and became a trustee. As an avid woodworker and painter, Mr. Cummings spent time in the hobby shop every day and sold his art and furniture at the Angola rodeo. He also donated furniture and clocks he made to the United Way.

IPNO represented him at his parole hearing and he was granted parole. On October 7, 2023, Mr. Cummings was released after 15 years of imprisonment. He left prison with dozens of pieces of art and his cat Peggy. He has relocated to California where he is living with his elderly father and working with his brother. IPNO is working with him to get his vendor’s license so that he can continue to sell his art at markets in Central California.
DAVID HENRY

FREED AFTER: 14 YEARS AND 5 DAYS

David Henry was arrested in 2009 for being the “go-between” in a drug transaction, passing a single rock of cocaine between the person selling it and an undercover police officer from Caddo Parish. He was charged with distribution and was convicted by a non-unanimous jury. He received a 50 year sentence at age 53 with an illegal parole restriction. The person selling the cocaine received a 15-year sentence.

Despite receiving an effective life sentence, Mr. Henry took rehabilitative programming in prison, maintained a good conduct record, and stayed close to his family. After many months of sustained advocacy from IPNO, which included showing the Judge that Mr. Henry received an illegal sentence that unlawfully restricted his parole eligibility, his sentence was reduced, allowing for his release on October 20, 2023, after 14 years and 5 days of imprisonment.

MICHAEL NELSON

FREED AFTER: 15 YEARS AND 5 DAYS

Michael Nelson was freed on November 1, 2023, after serving 15 years of a life sentence for stealing an empty brown paper lunch bag out of a parked car in St. Tammany Parish. At the time, his life sentence was mandatory under the law. Today, it would not be legal, and IPNO leveraged changes to the law to help secure his freedom.

While in prison, Mr. Nelson got his GED and Bachelor’s in Christian Ministry. He served as the Reentry Mentor for incarcerated men taking welding classes. In all of his nearly 4,000 days in prison, he never received a rule violation write-up. Mr. Nelson channeled his passion for horticulture and landscaping into passing the Louisiana State arborist, pesticide, horticulture, and landscaping examinations. He hopes to use his skills and knowledge to open up his own tree removal and landscaping business. He has been reunited with his two sons, his new grandchild, and his Aunt Barbara.
BY THE NUMBERS...

• To date, IPNO has received 7,137 requests for help from imprisoned individuals.
• 4,960 of those individuals have completed IPNO’s application.

Black people are over-represented in our criminal legal system. Black people make up 31.2% of Louisiana’s population but 64.6% of the prison population according to Louisiana Department of Corrections. This graph shows the demographics of those seeking help from IPNO.
Since this spring, IPNO has said goodbye to managing director Cat Forrester, supervising attorney Kirschelle McGowan, office manager Ceisha James-Hayes, and program coordinator Gwen Dilworth. Cat has returned to her hometown of Charleston, SC; Kirschelle is leading the Orleans Independent Police Monitor, and Gwen joined the Times-Independent editorial staff of Moab, UT as a fellow. IPNO misses you and wishes you the best.

IPNO welcomes office administrator Kate Gauthreaux, legal fellows Merrill Berkowitch and Calvin Duncan, communications and development manager Erica Williams, Avodah Service Corp members Lily Cooper and Cora Patz, and staff attorney Elena Malik. Welcome to IPNO!

IPNO’s former client and exoneree and current legal fellow Calvin Duncan graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland, OR in May of this year. Congratulations, Calvin!

IPNO’s executive director attended the American College of Trial Lawyers’ annual meeting in San Diego, CA to accept ACTL’s Emil Gumpert Award in September. This award of $150,000 is given to an organization dedicated to improving the administration of justice.

IPNO exoneree Raymond Flanks graduated from Thrive New Orleans Work Green program in June and served as the program’s distinguished commencement speaker. Raymond also spent some time with the Notre Dame Exoneration Project in October, speaking to students about wrongful convictions. Raymond lit a candle and prayed at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on campus for his mother.

IPNO staff participated in an overnight staff retreat at the River Retreat Center in Covington, LA in May. It provided the staff an opportunity to reflect, realign and reconnect with one another.
On October 2nd, the International Wrongful Conviction Day, IPNO organized a Rally Against Killing the Innocent with our partners at Capital Appeals Project, Promise of Justice Initiative, Orleans Public Defenders, Freedem Foundation, ACLU-LA, and the Voice of the Experienced. Nearly 250 people joined IPNO on the steps of Orleans Parish Criminal District Court in New Orleans calling on Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards and the Louisiana Pardon and Parole Board to commute the death sentences of all 57 individuals on Louisiana’s death row. Twelve innocent people have been exonerated from their death sentences, a punishment so final that it must be flawless, and yet, is far from it. Sister Helen Prejean, Yusef Salaam of Central Park Five, LA death row exoneree Shareef Cousin, LA State Senator Royce Duplessis, IPNO exoneree Raymond Flanks, producer and host of the Wrongful Conviction podcast Jason Flom, and Khaliah Ali, daughter of Muhammad Ali, spoke out powerfully for life and not death at the Rally.

On that same day, IPNO exoneree Jarvis Ballard spoke to the Black Law Students Association at LSU Law Center about wrongful convictions.

On October 13th, IPNO’s Oh Freedom! Gala was a huge success. We celebrated our clients, presented Flozell Daniels, Jr. with the John Thompson Award for Courage and Justice, and debuted our new film about LLEAD (Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database). Zion Harmonizers and Erica Falls helped us celebrate with their wonderful performances. We thank all of our supporters for making our 22nd Anniversary Celebration so special.
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