



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

THE NATIONAL REGISTRY OF EXONERATIONS | MARCH 18, 2024

A PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE NEWKIRK CENTER
FOR SCIENCE & SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL, AND
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAJOR THEMES

Exonerations. The Registry has recorded [153](#) exonerations that occurred in 2023.

Official Misconduct. Official misconduct occurred in at least [118](#) exonerations in 2023. [75](#) homicide cases—85% of homicide exonerations in 2023—were marred by official misconduct.

The Continued Importance of Professional Exonerators. Professional exonerators—Innocence Organizations (IOs) and Conviction Integrity Units (CIUs)—continued to play essential roles. They were responsible for 97 exonerations, 63% of the total. IOs took part in [67](#) exonerations, and CIUs helped secure [60](#) exonerations. IOs and CIUs worked together on 30 exonerations in 2023.

No-crime cases. Of the 153 exonerations in 2023, 30 percent were no-crime cases. These [46](#) exonerations include wrongful convictions for drug possession, murder, and child sex abuse. As in past years, no-crime exonerations include a disproportionate number of women. Female exonerees represent 15 percent of no-crime cases in 2023 but only 6 percent of total cases.

Race and wrongful convictions. Nearly 84 percent of exonerations last year (127/153) were persons of color. Nearly 61 percent of the exonerees (93/153) were Black. For a larger discussion on the role of race in wrongful convictions, please see our [2022 report](#).

Years Lost to Wrongful Imprisonment. Persons exonerated in 2023 lost an average of 14.6 years to wrongful imprisonment for crimes they did not commit—2,230 years in total. Later in this report, we discuss what’s behind the increase in average years lost to wrongful imprisonment for exonerees.

Compensation. Since 2019, the total compensation paid to exonerees has nearly doubled, and now exceeds \$4 billion. This is discussed later in the report.

EXONERATIONS IN 2023

The National Registry of Exonerations grew by 207 exonerations in 2023. We recorded 153 exonerations that occurred in 2023, and we added 54 exonerations that happened in previous years.

All told, as of February 25, 2024, the National Registry of Exonerations has recorded 3,478 exonerations in the United States from 1989 through the end of 2023.

The 153 exonerations that occurred in 2023 involved a range of crimes and contributing factors.

CRIMES

Homicide: [88](#) defendants were exonerated of homicide—[86](#) for murder, and [two](#) for manslaughter.

Sexual Assault: 17 defendants were exonerated of sex crimes; [10](#) in cases where the principal crime was sexual assault of an adult, and [seven](#) where the principal crime was child sexual abuse.

Other Violent Crimes: 23 defendants were exonerated of convictions for other violent crimes, such as assault, robbery, and attempted murder.

Non-Violent Crimes: 25 defendants were exonerated of non-violent offenses. This is a significant drop from 2022, when we recorded [105](#) wrongful convictions for drug crimes.

Misdemeanors: [Two](#) defendants were exonerated of misdemeanor crimes.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Official Misconduct: We know of official misconduct in [118](#), or 77% of exonerations that occurred in 2023.

Mistaken Witness Identification: [50](#) exonerations in 2023 were for convictions based at least in part on mistaken witness identifications.

False Confessions: [32](#) exonerations involved false confessions.

Perjury or False Accusation: [116](#) cases included perjury or other false accusations.

False or Misleading Forensic Evidence: [43](#) cases involved forensic evidence that was false or misleading.

Ineffective Assistance of Counsel: [59](#) cases included inadequate legal defense.

GROUP EXONERATIONS

We published eight cases, representing 471 individuals, in our [Groups Registry](#). In each of these cases, the exonerations are tied together by a pattern of systematic official misconduct either in the investigation and prosecution of these cases or committed by an official actor involved in the case.

HIGHLIGHTED CASES

Throughout this report, beginning below, we've included the stories of several individuals who were exonerated in 2023. They are remarkable accounts of persistence and determination in the face of injustice.



GLYNN SIMMONS

STATE: Oklahoma

CRIME: Murder

CONVICTED: 1975

EXONERATED: 2023

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

Mistaken Witness ID, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct, Inadequate Legal Defense

In 1975, [Glynn Simmons](#) was sentenced to death after he was convicted of a shooting in a liquor store in Edmond, Oklahoma, that wounded one clerk and killed another. He was

identified by a single eyewitness who had viewed eight different lineups. At his trial, numerous people testified that he was at a party at the time of the crime. His death sentence was commuted to life without parole, and his exoneration ended an investigation and legal battle during which documents surfaced showing the real perpetrators had been identified at the time of the crime, but that information was never disclosed to the defense. When Simmons was exonerated in September 2023, he had spent 48 years, one month and 18 days in prison—longer than any other exoneree in U.S. history.

I. BASIC PATTERNS

EXONERATIONS BY JURISDICTION

There were 153 exonerations in 32 states. (Table 1) There were no exonerations from cases prosecuted in federal court. Illinois had the most exonerations (24), followed by Texas (22), and New York (21).

Table 1: Exonerations in 2023 by Jurisdiction (n=153)

California— 7	Indiana— 2	New Hampshire— 1	Oregon— 7
Colorado— 2	Kansas— 1	New Jersey— 2	Pennsylvania— 16
Connecticut— 2	Louisiana— 3	New Mexico— 1	Tennessee— 2
Florida— 1	Maryland— 4	New York— 21	Texas— 22
Georgia— 2	Massachusetts— 3	North Carolina— 1	Vermont— 1
Hawaii— 2	Michigan— 6	North Dakota— 1	Virginia— 1
Idaho— 2	Minnesota— 1	Ohio— 6	Washington— 3
Illinois— 24	Missouri— 2	Oklahoma— 3	Wisconsin— 1

Although Illinois still ranks first in the number of exonerations, its 2023 numbers are lower than in recent years. This reflects the winding down of the exonerations tied to [misconduct of corrupt police officers led by Sgt. Ronald Watts](#) of the Chicago Police Department, who planted drugs or weapons on people after they refused to pay bribes. We published 100 Watts cases in 2022.

The other leading states are Texas, New York, and Pennsylvania. The 22 Texas exonerations include 12 cases tied to the misconduct of Gerald Goines, a former narcotics officer with the Houston Police Department. All but one of the 16 Pennsylvania exonerations are from Philadelphia, and eight of those cases include post-conviction work by the Philadelphia County District Attorney’s Conviction Integrity Unit. All of the exonerations in Pennsylvania last year were for murder convictions. In New York, 15 of the 21 exonerations are from the five boroughs of New York City.

The top four states accounted for 54 percent of the 2023 exonerations. The other 28 states help flesh out the enormous diversity and range of wrongful convictions in the United States. In Hawaii, for example, we reported two exonerations, for [Shawn and Albert Schweitzer](#), brothers who were wrongfully convicted of their roles in a notorious murder in Hawaii in 1991.

We reported seven exonerations from Oregon in 2023, the highest one-year total ever from that state. Four of those cases involved persons wrongfully convicted of driving with a suspended license due to a computer glitch at the state Department of Motor Vehicles. You can read more about these cases [here](#).



BRUCE MURRAY

STATE: Pennsylvania
CRIME: Murder
CONVICTED: 1983
EXONERATED: 2023

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct

For more than 40 years, [Bruce Murray](#) (shown right, with his attorney Michael Engle) worked to overturn his wrongful conviction for a 1980 murder in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Murray was falsely accused by several co-defendants, including a man facing bank-robbery charges. He had a strong alibi, but it wasn't enough. After decades of unsuccessful appeals, often acting pro se, Murray was able to reopen his petition for a writ of habeas corpus based on actual innocence and then receive pro bono assistance from Engle. His new petition noted earlier recantations and the state's failure to turn over exculpatory evidence at trial. He was exonerated on October 11, 2023. Engle said at the time: "While we are thrilled to see Bruce free, we are saddened that it took over four decades for him to receive some measure of justice."

THE CRIMES OF CONVICTION

The Crimes for which the Defendants Were Convicted. 84 percent (128/153) of the exonerations in 2023 were for violent crimes. We entered 88 homicide exonerations,

which accounted for 58 percent of the total and 69 percent of violent crimes. See Table 2 for a breakdown of exonerations by crime.

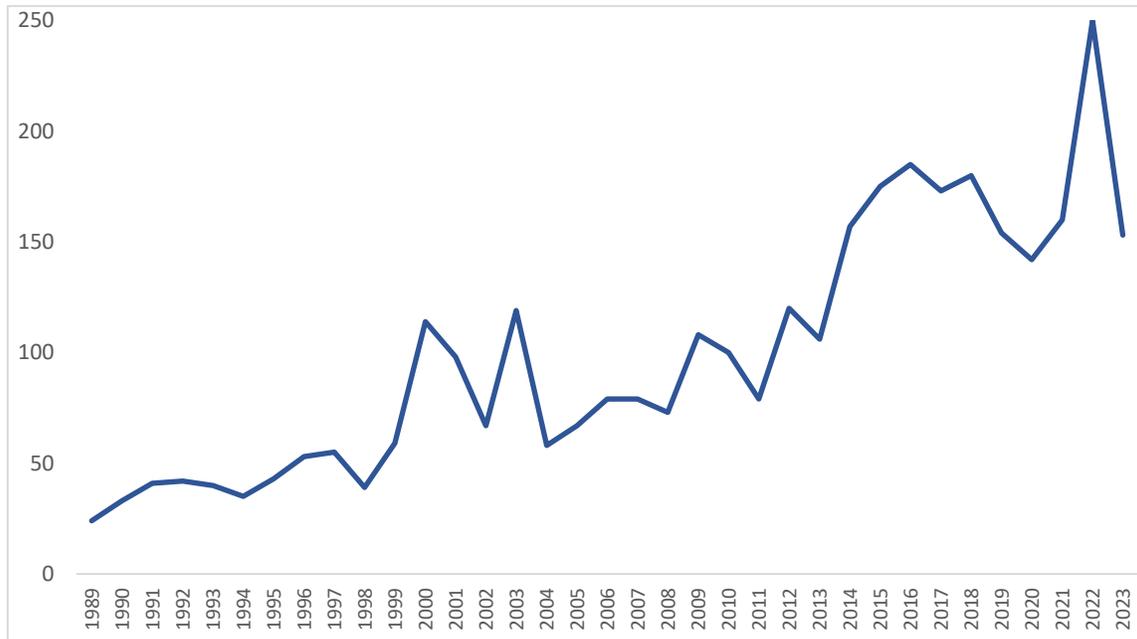
Table 2: Exonerations in 2023 by Crime

Homicide	<u>88</u> (57.5%)
<i>Murder</i>	<u>86</u>
<i>Manslaughter</i>	<u>2</u>
Sex Crimes	17 (11.1%)
<i>Sexual assault (on an adult)</i>	<u>10</u>
<i>Child sex abuse</i>	<u>7</u>
Other Violent Crimes	23 (15.7%)
<i>Robbery</i>	<u>6</u>
<i>Attempted murder</i>	<u>7</u>
<i>Assault</i>	<u>2</u>
<i>Other violent</i>	<u>8</u>
Non-Violent Crimes	25 (15.7%)
<i>Drug crimes</i>	<u>16</u>
<i>Weapons possession/sale</i>	<u>1</u>
<i>Other non-violent</i>	<u>8</u>
TOTAL	153 (100%)

TRENDS IN EXONERATIONS BY CRIME

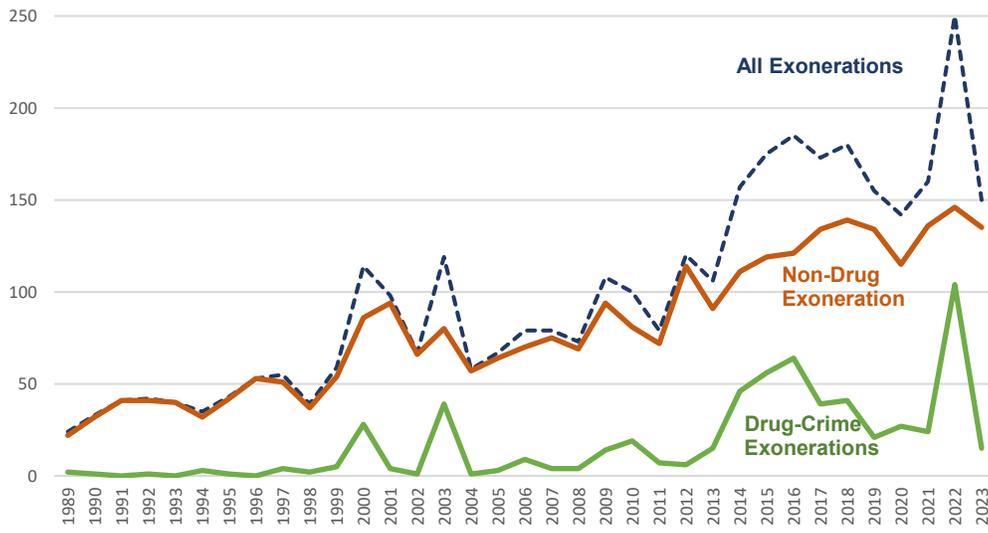
The Registry added 153 exoneration that occurred in 2023, about average over the last 10 years— except for the previous year, 2022, when we added 250. We’ve seen ups and downs like this before, especially from 1999 to 2004 and from 2014 to 2020 (see Figure 1), but the peak in 2022 is particularly dramatic.

Figure 1: Number of Exonerations by Year



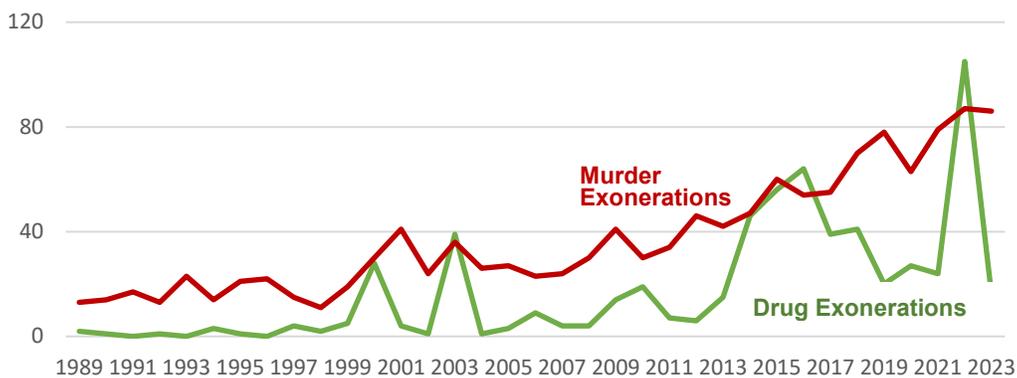
We know the main reason for these peaks and valleys. As we explained in our 2020 Annual Report, it’s drug exonerations, which have come in large clusters. The biggest was in 2022, with 105 drug crime exonerations in a single year, 99 of them in Cook County, Illinois (Chicago). If we exclude drug-crimes, the number of exonerations for the remaining crimes shows a relatively consistent increase from 1989 through 2023, with ups and downs. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of Exonerations by Year, With and Without Drug Crimes



Murder is the largest category of exonerations in the Registry, constituting 38% of the total (1,326/3,478) and nearly half of the non-drug crime exonerations. As a group, murder exonerations are more consequential to the exonerees and their communities and take much longer to obtain than exonerations for other crimes. The pattern for murders is probably the best single indicator of changes in exonerations over time. As we see in Figure 3, the number per year shows some fluctuation but a steady rise since 1989. Drug-crimes convictions are the next largest group, with fewer than half as many exonerations as murders (611/3,478)—and a timeline that dips and rises like a roller-coaster.

Figure 3: Numbers of Murder and Drug Exonerations by Year of Exoneration





CASSANDRA BLACK ELK

STATE: North Dakota

CRIME: Child Abuse

CONVICTED: 2022

EXONERATED: 2023

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: Official Misconduct, Inadequate Legal Defense

[Cassandra Black Elk](#) **pled guilty** to felony child neglect in 2022, after police officers in Bismarck, North Dakota, repeatedly told her that her infant daughter had died from Shaken Baby Syndrome. While in prison,

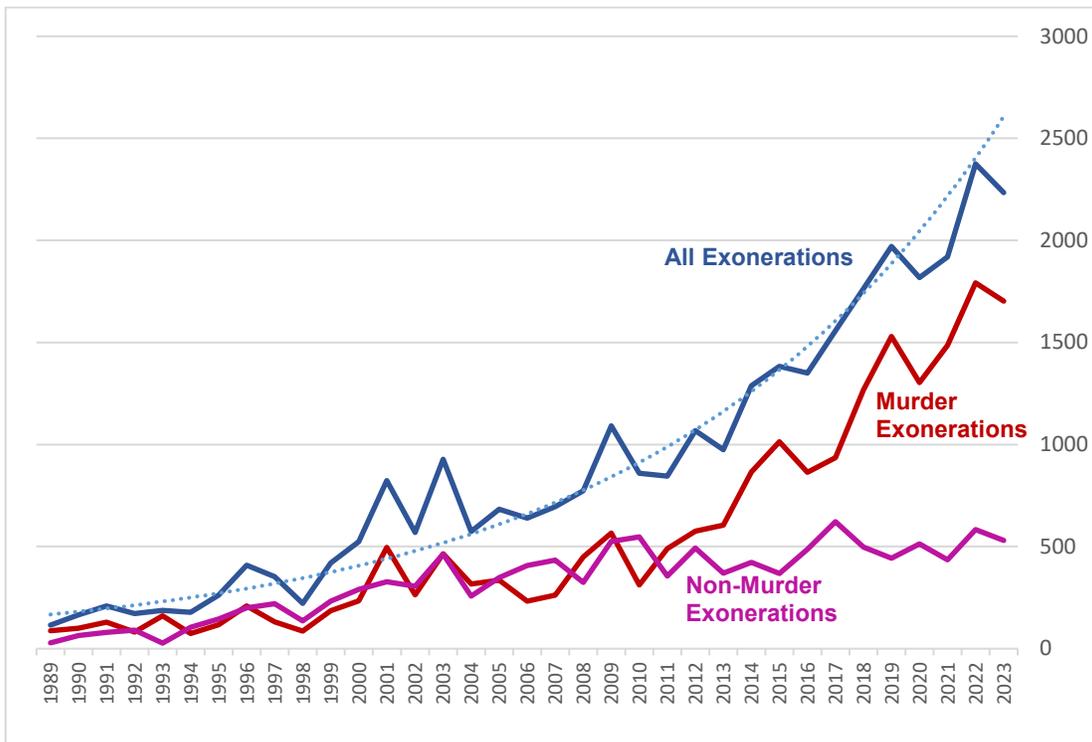
Black Elk obtained the final autopsy report, which had been completed two weeks after her plea. The report said there was no evidence of foul play. Black Elk, with assistance from the Great North Innocence Project, moved for a new trial, arguing that her attorney had been ineffective in failing to ask about the status of the final report or even the medical examiner's preliminary findings prior to the plea agreement. Her attorneys also said prosecutors had failed to tell Black Elk's attorneys about the preliminary findings. Black Elk was granted a new trial in January 2023, and her case was dismissed on October 19, 2023.

II. MEASURING AND COMPENSATING LOSS

YEARS LOST TO WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS

A major measure of the importance of exonerations is the number of *years lost to imprisonment* by the exonerees, which we compute from the date of the wrongful conviction to the date of release from confinement. The grand total for all 3,478 exonerations (as of February 25, 2024) is 31,678 years lost, an average of 9.1 years per exoneree. Figure 4 shows the total numbers of years lost to wrongful imprisonment, for all exonerations in each year since 1989.

Figure 4: Total Number of Years Lost, by Year of Exoneration and Crime

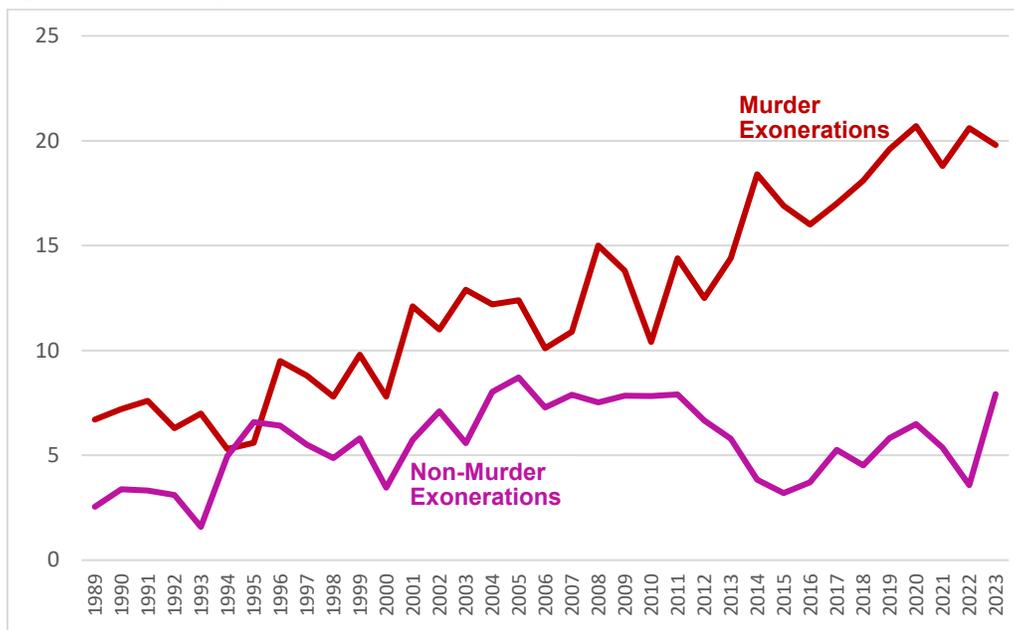


The number of years exonerees lost to wrongful imprisonment has been increasing at an exponential rate since 1989, doubling approximately every eight-and-a-third years.¹ Figure 4 shows that this extraordinary increase in lost years is driven by the huge number of years spent in prison by murder exonerees, which account for almost two thirds of the total (20,050/31,678). The number of years lost in other exonerations has also grown, but at a much slower rate.

Since 1989, the number of murder cases as a *proportion of all exonerations* has fluctuated around 38%, with no clear pattern. Over the past five years, it averaged 46% (393/859); for the five years before that, it was 33% (286/870). But the *average time from conviction to release* from prison for murder exonerees has tripled from 6.7 years to 19.8 years—while the average for non-murder exonerations has shown no systematic change for 20 years. See in Figure 5.

¹ The dotted line in Figure 4 is an exponential trend line, $y = 154.32e^{0.0808x}$, $R^2 = 0.9313$.

Figure 5: Average Number of Years Lost, by Year of Exoneration and Crime



Innocent defendants who remain in prison are much more likely to attract the attention that is necessary to secure exonerations. Few defendants convicted of crimes less serious than murder stay in prison for decades. As a result, about 80% of exonerations with 25 or more years lost are murder cases—and the number of exonerations with these extremely long periods of imprisonment is increasing rapidly. From 2011 through 2013, for example, there were 19 such exonerations in three years; a decade later, from 2021 through 2023, the registry added 91 exonerations of defendants who had served 25 years in prison or longer.

Why do we see this massive increase in exonerations of murder defendants who spent decades in prison? A plausible explanation is that we are witnessing the combined effects of two historical patterns that occurred many years apart.

First, decades ago—from the late 1970s through the mid-1990s—the murder rate in the United States was high, police forces and prosecutorial offices were stretched to their limits, public pressure to secure convictions was strong, and the danger of convicting the innocent was not well-documented. Judging from the exonerations we see, this led to many convictions of innocent murder defendants.

Second, now—starting more or less in the second decade of the twenty-first century—many of those aging innocent murder defendants are finally being exonerated as more resources are devoted to these injustices, especially by innocence organizations and prosecutorial conviction integrity units. Of particular note are the dozens of exonerations for murder and other violent crimes tied to misconduct by senior police detectives in New York and Chicago.



GIOVANNI HERNANDEZ

STATE: California

CRIME: Murder

CONVICTED: 2012

EXONERATED: 2023

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: Mistaken Witness ID, False or Misleading Forensic Evidence

At [Giovanni Hernandez's murder trial](#) in Los Angeles, California, in 2012, prosecutors and the defense stipulated that Hernandez, who was 14 years old at the time of his arrest, had missed four cell phone calls around the time of the gang-related shooting and that

Verizon was unable to determine the location of the phone when the calls were made. Based on mistaken witness identifications, Hernandez was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison. At the request of the Conviction Integrity Unit in the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, the FBI re-examined the cellphone evidence. The tower used by Hernandez's phone was just north of his house, supporting his alibi. Hernandez was exonerated on June 15, 2023.

COMPENSATION

Collecting information on compensation that exonerees receive after their release—if any—is particularly hard. Compensation, when it occurs, is usually obtained years after an exoneration and frequently gets little attention and often produces no official record.

Fortunately, the Registry has been able to collaborate with Professor Jeffrey Gutman of the George Washington University Law School, who has done an outstanding job of collecting, maintaining and analyzing data on compensation in conjunction with Registry data on exonerations. This past year, Professor Gutman joined the Registry staff as a part-time Special Contributor.

Recently, Professor Gutman reported on the data he collected on 3,222 exonerations of defendants who were convicted in state courts and exonerated through June 2023. His main finding is startling:

Since 1989, state and local governments in the United States have paid over \$4 billion to about 1,600 exonerees in compensation for their wrongful convictions and the time they spent in prison.

In 2019, Professor Gutman reported that the total paid by state and local governments was about \$2.2 billion. Less than five years later, that number has almost doubled—and it will continue to increase rapidly because many recent exonerees who have not yet been compensated will be compensated in the next few years, and the number of states that provide such compensation by law has increased since 2019.

The three states with the largest numbers of exonerations in the Registry are New York, Illinois and Texas. Illinois and New York are also the leaders in the amounts of compensation paid to exonerees. New York comes first, Illinois is second, and Texas is sixth. Table 3 displays the amounts of compensation exonerees received in each of these states, and in all states—and the numbers of exonerees who received compensation—for all exonerations, and for murder exonerations only.

Table 3: Compensation by State, for all Exonerations and for Murder Exonerations

STATE (number of exonerees)	ALL EXONERATIONS				MURDER EXONERATIONS				
	TOTAL PAID (number of recipients)	AVERAGE PER RECIPIENT	PERCENT EXONEREES PAID SO FAR	% LOST YEARS PAID SO FAR	TOTAL PAID (number of recipients)	AVERAGE PER RECIPIENT	PERCENT EXONEREES PAID SO FAR	% LOST YEARS PAID SO FAR	PERCENT OF TOTAL PAID SO FAR IN ALL CASES
NEW YORK (326)	\$1,140 Million (191)	\$6.0 Million	59%	72%	\$862 Million (109)	\$7.9 Million	70%	74%	76%
ILLINOIS (510)	\$735 Million (404)	\$1.8 Million	79%	73%	\$632 Million (150)	\$4.2 Million	70%	69%	86%
TEXAS (450)	\$192 Million (155)	\$1.2 Million	33%	61%	\$46 Million (26)	\$1.8 Million	45%	57%	24%
ALL STATES (3,222)	\$4,083 Million (1,613)	\$2.5 Million	50%	61%	\$3,076 Million (679)	\$4.5 Million	53%	62%	76%

We see, on the bottom row of Table 3, that 50% of all exonerees and 53% of murder exonerees received some compensation. But the amounts they received vary enormously.

Compensation is paid primarily for time spent in prison, so *years lost* is the major determinant of the amounts received. As we saw, murder exonerations account for about two-thirds of all years lost, and that proportion is growing (see Figure 5).

Not surprisingly, Table 3 shows that murder exonerations also received the lion’s share of all compensation—76%—even though they include only 42% of compensated exonerees (679/1,613). On average, a murder exoneree who was compensated received \$4.5 million, compared to \$1.1 million for the average compensated non-murder exoneree.

Table 3 also raises questions about other issues. Why, for example, are payments so much greater in New York than in other states—\$6 million on average for all exonerees, compared to \$1.8 million in Illinois and \$1.2 million in Texas? And why did 79% of all exonerees receive some compensation in Illinois, but only 33% in Texas?

We can answer some of these questions, and we hope to do a more complete job in the months and years to come. See our [compensation page](#) for more information on this subject.

Some differences in compensation reflect differences in the composition of exonerations from state to state. For example, why did Texas pay only 24% of its compensation to murder exonerees, about a third of national average of 76%? The main reason is that in Texas, only 11% of exonerations were murder cases (56/503)—less than a third of the national average of 40% (1,280/3,222).

Other differences reflect different timelines. Compensation always comes months or years, sometimes a decade or more after exoneration. Any tabulation of compensation is necessarily limited to cases that are at least a year or longer after exoneration, and even so, it will be incomplete because many compensation awards will take longer to occur.

The speed of the process varies from state to state, and from one type of case to another. At any point in time, exonerees in states with faster compensation procedures—or those who were convicted of crimes that get compensated more quickly—will have received a larger share of the total compensation they will ultimately get.

We focus on one major feature of compensation for exonerees: the source of the funds. Thirty-eight states, which include 92% of all exonerations (2,949/3,222), now provide payments from the state government to people who have been wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. In most states, there is an administrative or quasi-judicial procedure for accessing that compensation.

Exonerees may also file civil lawsuits for damages, usually against the police officers who investigated their cases, or the police departments and local governments that employ them.

In most cases, they claim that misconduct by those officers violated their federal constitutional rights and led to their wrongful conviction. Any damages they obtain, at trial or by pretrial settlement, are paid by the cities and counties involved.

Table 4 displays the compensation by state separately for each source: directly from the state, and from civil lawsuits.

Table 4: Compensation by State and Source

STATE (number of exonerees)	STATE COMPENSATION			CIVIL LAW SUITS			BOTH SOURCES	
	TOTAL PAID (number of recipients)	AVERAGE PER RECIPIENT	PERCENT OF EXONEREES PAID SO FAR	TOTAL PAID (number of recipients)	AVERAGE PER RECIPIENT	PERCENT OF EXONEREES PAID SO FAR	TOTAL PAID (number of recipients)	AVERAGE PER RECIPIENT
NEW YORK (326)	\$338 Million (149)	\$2.3 Million	46%	\$802 Million (146)	\$5.5 Million	45%	\$1,140 Million (191)	\$6.0 Million
ILLINOIS (510)	\$41 Million (366)	\$113,000	72%	\$694 Million (124)	\$5.6 Million	24%	\$735 Million (404)	\$1.8 Million
TEXAS (450)	\$166 Million (131)	\$1.2 Million	29%	\$26 Million (45)	\$573,000	10%	\$192 Million (155)	\$1.2 Million
ALL STATES (3,222)	\$994 million (1,218)	\$825,000	38%	\$3,089 Million (745)	\$4.1 Million	23%	\$4,083 Million (1,613)	\$2.5 Million

In general, state compensation is quicker and easier to obtain than awards from civil lawsuits. The process is cheaper and simpler, and exonerees need only show that they were falsely convicted; they do not need to prove that government officials violated their rights. On the other hand, the state compensation payments are considerably lower than those for successful litigants in civil lawsuits because almost all states have statutory caps on damages.

Table 4 reflects that dichotomy. Three-quarters of the exonerees who were compensated obtained state compensation (1,218/1,613) but they received only a quarter of the total—just under \$1 billion, an average of \$825,000 each.

The remainder—more than \$3 billion—went to exonerees who successfully sued for damages in civil rights or tort cases. They accounted for fewer than half of those who were compensated by a state but received an average of just over \$4 million. All told, 1,611 exonerees received an average of over \$2.5 million each, including 350 who received payments from both sources.

We end with a few of the consequences of how states structure their systems of compensation.

Of the three states listed, **New York** paid the most in state compensation, by far. It has the highest total state compensation—about \$1.1 billion, more than a quarter of the amount for all states—and an average of \$6 million per compensated exoneree, almost two-and-a-half times the national average.

In New York, state compensation for wrongful imprisonment is administered by the state's Court of Claims and is uncommonly generous. Unlike almost all other states, New York places no limit on the amount of compensation for wrongful imprisonment and has no formula for calculating that amount. Instead, the Court of Claims "determines [the sum that] will fairly and reasonably compensate" the exoneree. Using this system, the average state compensation award in New York is about double that in Texas, nearly three times the national average, and twenty times the average award in Illinois.

In **Illinois**, 72% of exonerees received state compensation, averaging \$113,000 each; total state compensation awarded is \$41 million. In **Texas**, only 29% of exonerees received state compensation but they averaged more than ten times as much as in Illinois, \$1.2 million each. Total state compensation was \$161 million.

Why this stark difference? The state compensation system in Illinois is straightforward, and the state (unlike most) will compensate exonerees for time spent on probation. On the other hand, the amount of compensation Illinois provides is low, topping out at less than \$268,000 for exonerees who spent more than 14 years in prison. As a result, the great majority of Illinois exonerees (including those who spent little or no time in custody) apply for and receive modest amounts in state compensation *and also* file civil lawsuits that are chancier and slower, but may pay far greater sums.

For example, Illinois has 211 drug-crime exonerees in our compensation database. Ninety percent of them (190/211) received state compensation awards, averaging \$62,000, including 42 who spent no time at all in custody after conviction. A few of them have already received civil damages in addition to their state compensation, and 99% of the rest (184/186) have civil lawsuits pending.

In **Texas**, state compensation is somewhat harder to obtain than in Illinois because it usually requires a finding of actual innocence by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. But the payments are far higher: \$80,000 for each year in prison and \$25,000 for each year on parole or a sex offender registry, an additional equivalent amount in annuity payment, plus other substantial benefits. On the other hand, Texas does not pay for time spent on probation, and—unlike Illinois, but in common with 10 other states—prohibits an exoneree who has received state compensation from suing for damages for the same wrongful imprisonment.

Not surprisingly, the great majority of Texas exonerees who spent years in prison opt for the faster and more reliable track, receive substantial state compensation, and forego civil lawsuits. As a result, while across the country, civil damages total more than *three times* the amount paid in state compensation, in Texas they amount to only *one-sixth* of total state compensation.

That focus on state compensation in Texas has systemic financial consequences:

- First, it lowers the total cost of compensation greatly. Across the country, civil damages total more than three times the total for state compensation, and civil awards average more than five times the average for state compensation payments. In Texas, civil damage payments are relatively uncommon, and they average only one-seventh of the national average and less than half the average of state compensation payments in Texas. That's why Texas's average payment to a compensated exoneree is less than half the national average, and one-fifth the average in New York.
- It also means that the vast bulk of the payments in Texas come from the state. In New York and Illinois, most of funds for compensation come from cities and counties, the entities that pay civil damage awards based on misconduct by police.

Finally, Texas has 225 drug exonerations in this dataset, but only 12% of them (28/225), received state compensation, compared to 90% in Illinois. Why so few? The likely main reason is that many of them spent little or no time in prison and would receive small awards or none if they could muster the help needed to access the system. On the other hand, if 90% of Texas drug-crime exonerees had received state compensation, the gap between Texas and Illinois in the overall rate of state compensation would almost disappear.



LOUIS WRIGHT

STATE: Michigan

CRIME: Child Sex Abuse

CONVICED: 1988

EXONERATED: 2023

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

False Confession, False or Misleading Forensic Evidence, Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct, Inadequate Legal Defense

Louis Wright was 29 years old

when he was arrested and

convicted in 1988 for sexually assaulting an 11-year-old girl in Albion, Michigan. He pled guilty after police said he confessed to the crime. Almost immediately he asked to withdraw his guilty plea, but that was denied. He was sentenced to 25 years to 50 years in prison. In 2021, the Cooley Innocence Project at Cooley Law School received a federal grant to support reinvestigation of cases in which unreliable forensic evidence played a role. DNA testing was performed and, in 2023, excluded him as the source of the biological evidence in the case. Wright had spent more than 35 years in prison.