

INNOCENCE PROJECT OF FLORIDA, INC.

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For Immediate Release

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PRESS RELEASE

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Alan Crotzer to Testify Before Congressional Subcommittee on Indigent Defense *Florida Man Spent 24 Years in Prison for Someone Else's Crime*

On Thursday, June 4, Alan Crotzer will join two other members of the National Committee on the Right to Counsel when he testifies before the Congressional House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security about the crisis facing indigent defense in America. Mr. Crotzer was wrongfully convicted and served 24 and a half years in prison for a crime he didn't commit due to a lackluster effort by his court-appointed defense counsel.

Mr. Crotzer was arrested in 1981 in St. Petersburg and charged with several crimes stemming from a double-kidnapping and rape that took place in Tampa. An eyewitness ID from a suggestive photo lineup was the trigger that set in motion a chain of events, from arrest to conviction to incarceration, that Mr. Crotzer said "profoundly affected [his] life in unimaginable ways." In a prepared statement, he thanked two lawyers from New York, David Menschel and Sam Roberts, who "put their lives on hold" and spent thousands of dollars to prove his innocence with DNA testing. Their performance, he said, stands in stark contrast to that of his appointed counsel.

In his statement, Mr. Crotzer listed the failings of his defense attorney – including ignoring his innocence claim and encouraging him to accept a plea to 25 years, meeting with Mr. Crotzer on only a few occasions before trial, failing to subpoena and interview alibi witnesses, and failing to sever his case from a co-defendant, whose disastrous self-representation at trial likely served to incriminate Mr. Crotzer by association. Mr. Crotzer says this confluence of feckless acts made his wrongful conviction "not only possible, but probable."

Public defenders' offices around the country have seen their funding slashed in recent years and faced dire straits even before the current national recession. According to a recent report by the Constitution Project titled *Justice Denied*, the State of Florida, where Mr. Crotzer was convicted, has seen its county budgets for defense counsel cut by millions of dollars. Some counties have resorted to charging convicts – many of them indigent – special fees to cover the costs of their trials. Several public defenders' offices in Florida have chosen to outright refuse to take new cases, citing their inability to fulfill their constitutional obligation to provide an adequate defense.

Mr. Crotzer now works with at-risk youth as an Intervention Specialist at the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and with the Innocence Project of Florida (IPF), where he raises awareness of criminal justice issues. He hopes his testimony will be the beginning of a real interest by Congress in reforming America's system of indigent defense so that stories like his "will become infrequent, rather than a constant refrain."

The Innocence Project of Florida is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to finding and freeing innocent people from Florida prisons. Alan Crotzer is a member of IPF's Board of Directors.

The National Committee on the Right to Counsel is a bipartisan committee of independent experts representing all segments of America's justice system created by the Constitution Project and the National Legal Aid & Defender Association. The Committee examines whether poor defendants are being provided with competent, experienced lawyers who have the necessary resources to defend them, and to create consensus recommendations for any necessary reforms. Their report Justice Denied can be found online at www.tcpjusticedenied.org. Alan Crotzer is a member of the National Committee on the Right to Counsel.

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Information about the Hearing:

Indigent Representation: A Growing National Crisis

House Committee on the Judiciary

Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

Thursday, June 4, 2009 9:30 AM

2141 Rayburn Building