

innocence project of florida, inc.

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For Immediate Release

PRESS RELEASE

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Innocent Man's Conviction Vacated After 27 Years

DNA Reveals Widespread Corruption in Brevard County

Today the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit Court granted William Dillon a new trial based on DNA evidence which demonstrates Dillon's actual innocence of the 1981 murder of James Dvorak in Canova Beach, Florida. Dillon's 27 years equals the longest time served by any of the 223 DNA exonerees nationwide. He would be the third man to be exonerated in Brevard County in recent years.

Mr. Dillon, who has always maintained his innocence, was convicted on the basis of unreliable and false evidence including: subsequently recanted testimony of a star witness who was threatened by and having sex with the State's lead investigator; fraudulent scientific testimony of a dog handler; testimony of a jailhouse snitch whose pending rape charge was dismissed after fingering Dillon; and a mistaken eyewitness identification by a man legally blind in one eye.

"This case is indicative of the culture of corruption in Brevard County," said David Menschel, Legal Director of the Innocence Project of Florida (IPF). "They were more concerned with getting a conviction than convicting the right person. Once they identified a suspect, they were willing to do anything – even manufacture evidence – in order to win."

Dillon's case is particularly troubling because it involved the now-discredited testimony of dog handler John Preston, a man who has been exposed as a fraud by both courts and the national media. But as Melissa Montle, Staff Attorney with the IPF explained, "The only way the dog could do what Preston purported it could do is if someone from the inside was feeding Preston the information."

Both Wilton Dedge and Juan Ramos were also wrongfully convicted on the basis of Preston's testimony. Seth Miller, Executive Director of the IPF, called for an investigation into the conduct of the Brevard County State Attorney's Office and Sheriff's Office as well as a comprehensive review of the hundreds of cases in which John Preston testified: "Governor Crist needs to take a hard look at what's been going on in Brevard County and restore public confidence in Florida's criminal justice system. Our organization would be happy to assist the Governor in these efforts."

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