

Rep. John Larson (D-CT 1st)

Thank you for considering my written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies as it considers funding requests. I urge you to fund the following innocence and forensic science programs in both FY17 and FY18:

- **\$5 million** for the Wrongful Conviction Review Program at the Department of Justice (DoJ), Bureau of Justice Assistance (*the Wrongful Conviction Review Program is a part of the Capital Litigation Improvement Program*)
- **\$5 million** for the Kirk Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program at DoJ's National Institute of Justice (NIJ);
- **\$14 million** for the Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grant Program at NIJ;
- **\$5 million** for DoJ to support the National Commission on Forensic Science; related forensic science standards setting activities at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST); and implementation research at the NIJ;
- **\$15 million** for NIST to support forensic science research and measurement science.

Freeing innocent individuals and preventing wrongful convictions through reform ***greatly benefits public safety***. When DNA identifies a wrongful conviction, it provides an opportunity to identify the real perpetrator of the crime. ***True perpetrators have been identified in approximately half of the over 300 DNA exoneration cases***. Unfortunately, many of these real perpetrators went on to commit additional serious violent crimes, including murder and sexual assault, while an innocent person was convicted and incarcerated in their place.

Since 2008, Connecticut Innocence Project has participated in two successful Bloodsworth

Program grants totaling \$2,060,000 and one successful Wrongful Conviction Review grant totaling \$250,000. All together, the state of Connecticut and local organizations have received \$3,796,000 from these programs.

To date, 349 individuals in the United States have been exonerated through DNA testing, including 20 who served time on death row. These innocents served an average of 14 years in prison before exoneration and release. However, the value of federal innocence and forensic science programs extends beyond the benefits to the exonerated. These critical programs help to prevent wrongful convictions by *enhancing the accuracy of criminal investigations and strengthening criminal prosecutions, resulting in a stronger, fairer system of justice that provides true justice to victims of crime.*

Wrongful Conviction Review Program

We know that wrongful convictions occur in cases where DNA evidence is not sufficient or even available to prove innocence. The National Registry of Exonerations currently lists a total of almost 2,000 exonerations since 1989 -- over 300 of which were based primarily on DNA. The Wrongful Conviction Review Program provides critical support to ensure that experts are available to navigate the complex landscape of post-conviction litigation, as well as oversee thousands of volunteer hours innocence organizations leverage to help investigate these cases and support the significant legal work they require. During the 114th Congress, the Wrongful Conviction Review Program contributed to the exoneration of **20 innocent individuals.**

The Wrongful Conviction Review Program provides funding to local innocence organizations so that they may provide this type of expert, high quality, and efficient representation for innocent

individuals. The program's goals are both to alleviate burdens placed on the criminal justice system through costly and prolonged post-conviction litigation *and to identify, whenever possible, the real perpetrator of the crime.* To help continue this important work, *I urge you to provide \$5 million for the Wrongful Conviction Review Program.* (Please note the Wrongful Conviction Review Program is a part of the Capital Litigation Improvement Program.)

The Bloodsworth Program

The Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program supports states and localities that want to pursue post-conviction DNA testing in appropriate cases. The program does not directly fund the work of local innocence organizations, but instead focuses on state and local applicants, including law enforcement agencies, crime laboratories, and others – often in collaboration with each other, as well as with local innocence organizations. *The program has resulted in the exonerations of 32 wrongfully convicted persons in 10 states. The true perpetrator was identified in 11 of those cases.* Given the importance of this program to both innocent individuals and public safety, *I urge you to provide \$5 million to continue the work of the Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program.*

The Coverdell Program

The Coverdell Program provides state and local crime laboratories and medical examiner offices with much needed federal funding to carry out their work both efficiently and effectively. As the program supports both the capacity of crime labs to process forensic evidence and the essential function of ensuring the integrity of forensic investigations in the wake of serious allegations of negligence or misconduct, *I urge you to provide \$14 million for the Coverdell Program.*

Forensic Science Improvement

To continue the critical work to improve forensic science, and help prevent wrongful convictions, we urge you to provide *the following amounts for forensic science improvements*:

- **\$5 million for the Department of Justice**, including:
 - **\$1 million** for the DOJ-NIST National Commission on Forensic Science.
 - **\$1 million** for NIJ to conduct implementation and applied research in this area.
 - **\$3 million** directed to NIST to support technical standards development in forensic science through the Organization of Scientific Area Committees.
- **\$15 million for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)** at the

Department of Commerce to support forensic science research and measurement science.

Thank you for your leadership in helping to ensure the integrity, accuracy, and reliability of our nation's criminal justice system. I urge you to support all of the aforementioned programs.