

The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice



www.thejeffreyledskovicfoundationforjustice.org

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About Jeffrey Deskovic



Jeffrey Deskovic lost his freedom on January 18, 1991, when he was sentenced to fifteen years to life in prison for the brutal rape and murder of Angela Correa, his classmate at Peekskill High School. In fact, she was raped and murdered by a crack addict named Steven Cunningham. Police deceived Jeff, claiming he failed three polygraph tests he passed, and subjected him to nearly seven hours of uninterrupted interrogation without food, a lawyer or parent present. He falsely confessed after police promised that, if he confessed, he could go home. He was only sixteen years old.

Prosecutors and the medical examiner knew DNA in Angela did not match Jeff. Yet, they concocted evidence to frame him. Jeff spent the next sixteen years in several maximum security prisons throughout New York State. Meanwhile, Cunningham remained free and three years after he murdered Angela, he murdered his girlfriend's sister, a Peekskill school teacher named Patricia Morrison. She had three small children.

Cunningham's DNA was deposited into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System (CoDIS) and matched the DNA in Angela. On March 16, 2007, Cunningham pled guilty to Angela's rape and murder. At sentencing, Angela's mother said Jeff was "blamed and sacrificed like a lamb," and Patricia's mother said had police not falsely accused Jeff, her daughter "would still be with us." Had Cunningham gotten away with murder a second time, Jeff would still be in prison.

Jeff's rape and murder charges were dismissed on November 2, 2006. The judge who freed Jeff admitted "the undeniable fact that nothing can be done in this courtroom here today to erase the pain and suffering endured by you and your loved ones over the past sixteen years." Jeff was marched into prison at age seventeen and walked out at age thirty-three. His entire adolescence and formative years had been stolen from him. To this day, none of the police, prosecutors or medical examiners who engineered Jeff's conviction ever have been disciplined or suffered any career setbacks as a result of their misdeeds. In fact, the Peekskill police lieutenant in charge was promoted to Chief.

After his release, Jeff earned a B.S. in Behavioral Science from Mercy College and his M.A. from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. In March 2012, he launched The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice, and donated \$1.5M from his compensation to get the Foundation off the

ground. The Foundation works to free the wrongfully convicted, provides exonerees financial support to help them reintegrate into society, and engages in public advocacy to raise awareness about the need for criminal justice reform to prevent wrongful convictions in the future.

Jeff has appeared in local and national media, and spoken at forums across the country. He has spoken at countless academic institutions, nonprofit organizations and community groups, testified before state legislatures, and lobbied high-level elected officials. He advocates video recording all police interrogations, changing witness identification procedures, creation of standardized evidence preservation regimes, and limits on the devil's bargain prosecutors make with jailhouse snitches and criminals for testimony against targeted defendants. In recent decades, eighteen men on death row awaiting execution were freed by DNA testing which proved they had been wrongfully convicted. Jeff is strongly opposed to the death penalty, advocates for its repeal, and fights strongly against its reinstatement, lest the innocent be put to death.



About The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice

Innocent prisoners feel powerless and vulnerable. Jeff launched the Foundation, a § 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to empower the powerless. The Foundation employs a trained staff of attorneys and seasoned investigators, and links exonerees to a support network to assist their re-entry into society.

Litigation:

DNA evidence is only available in only 10-12 % of all serious felony cases. Other innocence groups focus exclusively on litigating DNA cases. This leaves the majority of innocent prisoners without legal resources to overturn their wrongful convictions. The Foundation fills this gap. It examines cases involving false or coerced confessions, misidentification, corrupt or incentivized witnesses, and prosecutorial misconduct. Unlike other wrongful conviction advocates, the Foundation takes on the hard cases which require labor-intensive investigation to unearth evidence needed to overturn wrongful verdicts and free the innocent.

Re-Entry:

Through Jeff's experience, the Foundation knows that release from prison does not truly free the innocent who were wrongfully imprisoned. Many exonerees are shunned by immediate and extended family members and friends. Once free, they remain alone. Re-entry requires a support system to help them rebuild their lives. When Jeff was released, an advisor at Mercy College took him under her wing and showed him the skills ordinary people take for granted, such as grocery shopping, using a bank ATM, or accessing the Internet. The Foundation assists exonerees with vocational training and therapeutic support, emergency financial assistance, and job placement. Through its pilot program, the Foundation leases an apartment that provides

temporary housing for exonerees. The Foundation recognizes that exonerees cannot be truly free until they can become independent and self-supporting.

Public Advocacy and Policy Change:

In the past fifty years, more than 3,000 wrongfully convicted prisoners have been exonerated. They served an average of thirteen years in prison for crimes they did not commit. As a society, we can no longer remain silent about this glaring injustice. The Foundation believes that public advocacy is the best way to increase awareness of the problem. By giving a voice to the voiceless, the Foundation hopes to build momentum for permanent change.



Media

Jeff has been interviewed extensively in national and local print, television and radio outlets such as *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, FOX News, CBS, the *Huffington Post* and other outlets.reform. Below is a comprehensive timeline of the most prominent stories written by and about Jeff since his release in 2006.

Release

- *The New York Times* (9/21/06): [DNA Evidence Frees a Man Imprisoned for Half His Life](#)

Exoneration – 1 Year Later

- *The New York Times* (2/4/07): [Exonerated and Freed at 32, but Feeling 17](#)
- *The New York Times* (7/3/07): [Playing Down DNA Evidence Contributed to Wrongful Conviction, Review Finds](#)
- *The New York Times* (11/25/07): [Free and Uneasy: The First Year Out](#)

The Real Perpetrator

- *The New York Times* (3/15/07): [Inmate Enters Guilty Plea in '89 Killing](#)

Overall Wrongful Conviction Story

- RNN *Richard French Live* (3/20/13): [Compensation for the Wrongfully Convicted](#)

Foundation

- *The Wall Street Journal* (3/12/12): [Exonerated Man Now Helps Others](#)
- FOX 5 *Good Day New York* (3/16/12): [Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice](#)

Life in Prison

- CBS (1/28/13): [Jeff Deskovic Discusses His Exoneration](#)

Speaking Engagements

- News12 Hudson Valley (10/9/13): [Jeffery Deskovic, wrongly convicted of murder, speaks to criminal justice students at Rockland Community College](#)

Case Success Story

- *New York Daily News* (1/23/13): [Brooklyn man jailed for 22 years released after overturned conviction](#)
- *The Huffington Post* (2/21/13): [Exonerated After 23 Years: Helped by Another Exonerated Victim](#)
- The Impact News – Mercy College (3/17/13): [Exonerated Mercy Alum Helping Others Gain Freedom](#)
- News 12 New York (9/30/13): [Judge Says "William Lopez Deserves Apology"](#)

Advocacy

- *The Huffington Post* (9/9/09): [Trial and Error: Houston, We've Got a Problem](#)

Op-Eds

- Politico (6/15/09): [Sonia Sotomayor's 'empathy' isn't all it's cracked up to be](#)
- *Sports Illustrated* (2/4/13): [The Most Captive Audience](#)



Testimonials

“Yours is a story that deserves to be heard by as many people as possible.” - Richard Aborn, President of the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City and 2009 Candidate for Manhattan District Attorney (August 2009)

“In the short time Jeffrey has been free, he has had a huge impact nationally on the dialogue about the death penalty and wrongful convictions. It amazes me how he emerged from wrongful imprisonment highly educated, well read and extremely articulate. Given the limited resources he was offered while incarcerated, his education was largely self-motivated and continues to this day.” - Laura Porter, Director of Organizing, Equal Justice USA (June 2009)

“Your testimony gave direct insight into problems within the current system. [...] It is one of the most important ways we learn what changes in penal law must be made.” - Joseph R. Lentol, New York State Assembly Member, Assembly District 50 (July 2008)

“Deskovic has shown unusual tact and skill in walking legislators through his personal nightmare to help them appreciate the helplessness he experienced as an innocent man caught up in New York’s criminal justice system and to better understand the human costs associated with wrongful convictions.” - Christine Tramontano, Legislative Representative, Malkin & Ross (June 2008)

“As chair of the New York State Democratic Task Force on Criminal Justice Reform and a State Senator representing a district comprised of over 300,000 residents, I believe that it is the responsibility of every elected official to ensure that their constituents are living in safe communities, where criminal activity is dealt with by punishing the guilty while protecting the innocent.” – New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman, (April 2008, as then-Senator for 31st District)

“Jeffrey has been NYADP’s most effective and well-received public speaker since early 2007. He blends credibility, authenticity, clarity and emotional balance. [...] He succeeds in using his personal tragedy to shine light on the patterns of unfairness that exist in our legal system.” -David Kaczynski, Executive Director, New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty (June 2008)

“He truly wants to play a part in making it less likely that another innocent person will suffer from the flaws in the system. Although the system makes provisions to help truly guilty persons assimilate back into society, currently no such assistance is provided to actual innocents who have been wrongfully convicted. Changes need to be made and Jeff is devoting his energies to the cause.” - G. Daniel Lassiter, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Ohio University (November 2008)