



Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University

For Immediate Release:
December 12, 2006

For Assemblyman Gianaris:

Maggie McKeon
718-545-3889
315-730-5101

For the Innocence Project:

Eric Ferrero
212-364-5346
646-342-9310

ASSEMBLYMAN GIANARIS, INNOCENCE PROJECT AND VICTIMS OF WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS CALL FOR PASSAGE OF INNOCENCE COMMISSION

(NEW YORK; December 12, 2006) – In light of the recent exonerations of several New Yorkers convicted of crimes they did not commit, Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria), leaders of the Innocence Project and three recent victims of wrongful convictions today called for the passage of legislation (A.4084) that would establish an Innocence Commission to investigate wrongful convictions in New York State.

“One innocent person spending years in prison for crimes he did not commit is one too many,” said Assemblyman Gianaris. “Unfortunately, recent history proves that the problem is more widespread than anyone would like to admit. We need a systemic approach to keep this from happening again, and that is why I introduced legislation seeking a permanent Innocence Commission in New York.”

The legislation authored by Assemblyman Gianaris would create a commission of 10 appointees representing law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, crime victims, defense attorneys and academicians. Similar to the process used by the National Transportation Safety Board after airline accidents, the Innocence Commission would examine cases of exoneration after the fact and issue reports and recommendations to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

“New York has long been at the forefront of the DNA-inspired revolution in our criminal justice system. We were the first state to pass a law allowing inmates to have post-conviction DNA testing, and we were the first state to create a commission on forensic science to regulate crime labs,” said Peter Neufeld, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Innocence Project, which is affiliated with Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University. “Now we need to establish an Innocence Commission to identify the major causes of wrongful convictions and implement reforms to reduce the risk of future miscarriages of justice.”



Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University

Joining Assemblyman Gianaris and Peter Neufeld were three recent exonerees who were released through the work of the Innocence Project:

- [Scott Fappiano](#) of Brooklyn, who spent 21 years in prison after being convicted of rape and burglary in 1985;
- [Alan Newton](#) of the Bronx, who spent 21 years in prison after being convicted of rape, robbery and assault in 1985; and
- [Douglas Warney](#) of Rochester, who spent 10 years in prison after being convicted of murder in 1997.

Of the 188 DNA exonerations in the country, more than 10% (21 people) were from New York, including four in 2006 alone. These 21 New Yorkers served a combined total of 234 years in jail for crimes they did not commit.

A number of other states, including California, Illinois, North Carolina and Pennsylvania have taken similar measures in recent years in response to post-conviction DNA exonerations.

Additional Resources:

[Fact sheet on Innocence Commissions in CA, CT, IL, NC, PA, WI](#)

[Background and statistics on the 21 DNA Exonerations in New York state](#)

[Innocence Project policy statement on Innocence Commissions, including model legislation for your state.](#)

###