

## Tarrant County Man Exonerated of Murder After 21 Years

### New evidence revealed Nolley was not the source of a bloody print found at murder scene

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In 1998 John Nolley was convicted of the 1996 murder of Sharon McLane of Bedford. New evidence in the case eventually pointed to Nolley's innocence and he was released in 2016. (Published Wednesday, Oct. 3, 2018)

A North Texas man wrongly convicted of murder two decades ago was officially exonerated Wednesday.

In 1998, John Nolley was convicted of the 1996 murder of Sharon McLane of Bedford. New evidence in the case pointed to Nolley's innocence and he was released on bond in 2016.

"I'm just ready to let the water go under the bridge and keep going," Nolley said after his exoneration. "Life's just been good. The path I've travelled, it makes me better appreciate life and you know relationships."

On Wednesday, Tarrant County District Attorney Sharen Wilson filed an order dismissing the conviction. The paperwork was signed by State District Judge Louis Sturns, who apologized to Nolley on behalf of the state, and the charge was dismissed.

### Exoneration Expected for North Texas Man Wrongly Convicted



A North Texas man who was wrongly convicted of murder is expected to be exonerated Wednesday morning. In 1998, John Nolley was convicted of the 1996 murder of Sharon McLane of Bedford. New evidence in the case eventually pointed to Nolley's innocence and he was released in 2016.

(Published Wednesday, Oct. 3, 2018)

"On behalf of the judiciary of this state and this county, I apologize to you for what happened to you," the judge told him. "I realize this apology cannot take back 21 years of your life that was spent in prison."

The exoneration means Nolley has been declared innocent and makes him eligible for state compensation, which is \$80,000 for each year he was in prison, or about \$1.5 million.

The DA's Conviction Integrity Unit, the Innocence Project and Fort Worth attorney Reagan Wynn reinvestigated the case and found new evidence that revealed Nolley was not the source of a bloody palm print found on a piece of paper recovered from McLane's body.

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Wilson released a statement saying, "As prosecutors, it is our sworn duty to get it right. And when we discover that errors have been made, it is our responsibility to make it right."

The CIU also discovered evidence that discredited the testimony of two informants — both facing criminal charges at the time — who contributed to the conviction.

"We are incredibly grateful to District Attorney Sharen Wilson and her conviction integrity unit," the Innocence Project's Nina Morrison said in 2016. "It is because of the Unit's commitment to seeking the truth that Mr. Nolley's conviction was reversed today."

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McLane was found stabbed to death in her home Dec. 14, 1996. Evidence suggested she was killed sometime after work three days earlier.

On Dec. 12, a married couple who lived in McLane's apartment complex heard a woman's "blood-curdling screams" just after 3 p.m. Nolley was at work at the time.

Police suspected Nolley because he called a friend's pager from McLane's phone and was not initially forthcoming about seeing her Dec. 11.

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Nolley was charged and convicted despite no physical evidence linking him to the crime, according to a statement released by the Innocence Project. His conviction was mostly based on the testimony of two witnesses.

"False informant testimony has contributed to nearly 15 percent of the 341 DNA exonerations, yet there are very few policies in place around the nation to make this deeply flawed evidence more reliable," the Innocence Project co-director Barry Scheck said.

It brought attention to the fact that in the past, Tarrant County did not track jailhouse informant testimony. This caused a change in procedure for the county which eventually inspired a change in state law to require tracking. Now, there is a strong push to make the change federally.

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"We cannot change the past but we are committed to learning from it, so we can ensure that errors are never repeated," Wilson said. "John Nolley's legacy to the criminal justice system will live on through the legislation his case inspired, ensuring no person should have to defend himself against unsubstantiated, unreliable jailhouse testimony."

Nolley said he's not bitter or angry.

"I always knew that wasn't how my life was supposed to end," Nolley said Wednesday. "I woke up every day believing that was going to be the day. And eventually it came."

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