

# WITNESS TO INNOCENCE

Kirk Bloodsworth Testimony in Support of HB 742  
House Judiciary Committee  
Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

My name is Kirk Bloodsworth. I was sentenced to death in Maryland. I spent 8 years, 10 months, and 19 days in prison, 2 years of which were on death row, for a crime I did not commit. I was the first American on death row to be exonerated with DNA evidence.

You might be familiar with my story because I fought successfully to end Maryland's death penalty and Congress created the Bloodsworth grant DNA testing program in my name. Because my case is high profile, people wrongly assume that I'm financially secure.

In 1994 the state of Maryland paid me \$300,000 in state compensation for my wrongful imprisonment. I used that money to pay back my father, who spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees to save my life.

At the age of 60, my wrongful conviction continues to economically impact me. I am living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to cover medical expenses from my recent battle with liver cancer. I have no savings or retirement money. Senate Bill 14 would provide me with supplemental compensation, and it would have a big impact in my life.

The story of my wrongful conviction began in 1984. At the time I was a recently married, 22-year-old, honorably discharged marine with no criminal history, working as an Eastern Shore waterman when a terrible tragedy occurred. A nine-year-old girl named Dawn Hamilton was found raped and murdered in a wooded area. It would take nearly two decades for Dawn's murderer to be brought to justice, because I was mistakenly convicted of his crimes. I will never forget the sound of the death row cell door slamming shut like a tail gate of a dump truck.

Years went by, and my lawyers learned that there was another suspect in the case that we had not been told about. More years went by and I learned of DNA technology. When the prosecutor's office finally agreed to DNA testing, the results showed that the DNA did not match mine. I received a full pardon in December of 1993.

It is not controversial to say that no innocent person should be sent to death row. Once a mistake like what happened to me is uncovered, it should be rectified as thoroughly and as quickly as possible, including compensation for the time lost due to being wrongfully convicted and incarcerated.

As you can imagine, much of the damage done by a wrongful conviction cannot be rectified. The lost opportunities cannot be recouped and the psychological impact of facing execution never goes away.

[Witness to Innocence](http://www.witnesstoinnocence.org) | [Empowering the Exonerated to End the Death Penalty](http://www.witnesstoinnocence.org)  
1501 Cherry Street | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102  
[www.witnesstoinnocence.org](http://www.witnesstoinnocence.org) | [info@witnesstoinnocence.org](mailto:info@witnesstoinnocence.org)

Financial compensation cannot fully remedy the effects of a wrongful conviction, but it is absolutely essential. For me, navigating life after a death row exoneration means building and maintaining a future I never thought I would see. The importance of having the financial means to provide for myself and access needed resources cannot be overstated.

It's been 27 years and I am still suffering the consequences of my wrongful conviction. Despite my exoneration, people still believed I did it, which made it hard to get a job. I was homeless for a time.

I have survived financially by being paid for speaking engagements and working for a toolmaker. I am now the Executive Director of Witness to Innocence, an organization of men and women from across the country who were wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death. But, in the middle of the pandemic last year, I was diagnosed with liver cancer. Though I have health insurance, I still have stacks of medical bills that I have to pay out of pocket as I AGAIN fight for my life. I am also helping my father who is suffering from dementia and requires 24-hour care.

HB 742 would provide supplemental compensation to the five exonerees who were compensated prior to 2005. This is a drop in the bucket in the state budget, and it would mean real justice for the small group of us who lost years of our lives in prison for crimes we did not commit.

Before being wrongfully convicted, my dream was to own a boat and become a commercial fisherman. I had just gotten married three months before the arrest and my whole life was in front of me. This promising future was unjustly ripped away from me. I missed out on the opportunities to build a career, invest money and save for retirement.

I've done my best to turn lemons into lemonade. I committed myself to a new dream of helping to prevent anyone else from going through what I did. Today, I stand before you and urge you to support HB 742 so that I and others can receive much needed supplemental compensation.

Respectfully,



Kirk Bloodworth  
Executive Director