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200th Death Row Exoneration Underscores Critical Flaws in U.S. Criminal Legal System

The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) has documented 200 death row exonerations in the United States since 1973

WASHINGTON, DC—July 3, 2024— This week marks an historic milestone in the administration of capital punishment. On July 1, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California vacated the conviction and death sentence for Larry Roberts, convicted of killing two people in 1983, after the California Attorney General’s Office said it would not retry him. Mr. Roberts is the 200th exoneree in the modern death penalty era.

The Death Penalty Information Center has tracked and documented the 200 exonerations that have occurred since 1973. They are powerful reminders of the fallibility of the death penalty, and another reason [50% of the American public](#) no longer believes their government can fairly use the death penalty.

“The wrongful convictions of these 200 people are the result of mistakes, misconduct, and the political ambitions of government officials that the American public should no longer tolerate,” said Robin M. Maher, the Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. The Center’s recent report, [Lethal Election](#), documents the ways in which the U.S. electoral system contributes to unfairness and injustice like wrongful convictions.

The 200 men and women have been freed from death rows across 30 different states. Analysis from the Death Penalty Information Center reveals that these individuals collectively spent 2,621 years in harsh prison conditions for crimes they did not commit.

- On average, each death row exoneree spent 13 punishing years under sentence of death before their exoneration, with some individuals spending more than 40 years fighting to prove their innocence.
- 65% of death row exonerees are people of color and 54% are Black, highlighting systemic racial disparities.
- Florida has had the highest number of death row exonerations of any state, with 30 since 1973, followed by Illinois (22) and Texas (18).
- 70.5% of death row exonerations were caused by official misconduct by police, prosecutors, or other government officials, and 65% included false accusations or perjury.

“The exoneration of Larry Roberts is a sobering reminder for lawmakers, elected officials, and the public to re-evaluate use of the death penalty and take steps to ensure that all defendants

and prisoners have competent legal representation, access to the courts, and adequate due process,” said Maher. “The damage to the 200 exonerees and their families cannot be undone, but there are important steps that must be taken to prevent further harm to the men and women in the criminal legal system.”

For more information on each of the 200 exonerations, please visit the Death Penalty Information Center’s Innocence Database, [here](#). To learn more about other issues pertaining to capital punishment, please visit the Death Penalty Information Center’s website at deathpenaltyinfo.org.

Members of the media who would like to arrange an interview with DPIC Executive Director, Robin M. Maher, please email media@deathpenaltyinfo.org or call DPIC’s media line at 202-289-4022. Ms. Maher’s email is rmaher@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

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The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to serve the media, policymakers, and the general public with data and analysis on issues concerning capital punishment and the people it affects. DPIC does not take a position on the death penalty itself but is critical of problems in its application.