The Travis County District Attorney's (TCDA) Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU) is dedicated to ensuring that anyone wrongfully convicted in Travis County has a fair opportunity to challenge their conviction. The CIU reviews cases of actual innocence and potential wrongful convictions, working to ensure that justice is served. Under DA Jose Garza, the CIU has added more staff, dedicated additional resources, and implemented clear policies and procedures to ensure just and truthful results. Over the last five years, the CIU has evaluated hundreds of cases for potential review. This report highlights the cases that the CIU has selected for full investigation and litigation from January 2021 through December 2025.[1]

CIU Cases Completed

***Rosa Jimenez**, D-1-DC-04-904165-D, murder / injury to a child, sentenced to 99 years at trial, dismissed for Actual Innocence, 2023.*

In 2023, Rosa Jimenez was exonerated after serving 18 years in prison for a crime that never took place. In 2003, Ms. Jimenez was convicted of murder and injury to a child based on the theory that she had shoved paper towels down the throat of a toddler while babysitting, causing the child to die. She was sentenced to 99 years in prison. Ms. Jimenez always maintained her innocence, but experts at trial testified that the choking could not have been accidental, and that a toddler would not and could not have put paper towels in his own mouth by himself.

In 2021, hearings were held before the Honorable Karen Sage in the 299th District Court. The hearings came after the TCDA CIU conducted an in-depth review of evidence in the case including reports prepared by numerous pediatric airway experts who "unanimously concluded that the choking incident was the result of a tragic accident." Based on this new evidence, TCDA agreed that Ms. Jimenez was entitled to relief, and the District Court in turn recommended that the Court of Criminal Appeals grant relief.

In 2023, the Criminal Court of Appeals (CCA) granted habeas corpus relief to Ms. Jimenez and sent the case back to the District Court for further proceedings. The Travis County District Attorney's Office moved to dismiss all charges based on Jimenez is innocent." [2]

***Lamarcus Turner**, D-1-DC-14-300921, possession of a controlled substance, sentenced to 10 years at trial, reversed & remanded for new trial, dismissed for lack of evidence, 2022.*

Mr. Turner was convicted of drug possession based, in part, on evidence tested by the now-shuttered Austin Police Department DNA Lab. After the DNA was reviewed by one of the country's leading DNA experts and found to be unreliable, the CIU agreed that Mr. Turner should not have been convicted of that charge. The Court of Criminal Appeals granted habeas corpus relief on these grounds (TX CCP 11.073), and remanded the case to Travis County for further proceedings. TCDA moved to dismiss the case because of the lack of reliable evidence.

***Billy Faircloth**, D-1-DC-11-200824-A, aggravated assault, sentenced to 60 years at trial, remanded for new trial and dismissed for lack of evidence, 2023.*

Mr. Faircloth was convicted of aggravated assault and sentenced to 60 years in prison. The evidence at trial against Mr. Faircloth included DNA found on a rock used as a weapon in the assault. However, the rock had been improperly stored in Mr. Faircloth's shoe prior to DNA testing, raising the possibility that DNA from Mr. Faircloth's shoe was transferred onto the weapon, yielding unreliable results. Because the DNA evidence was material to Mr. Faircloth's conviction, TCDA agreed that Mr. Faircloth did not have a fair trial. The Court of Criminal Appeals agreed, granted habeas corpus relief, and remanded the case for further proceedings. TCDA moved to dismiss the case for lack of reliable evidence, and the District Court granted the motion.

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[1] The first CIU in the country was founded in Dallas in 2007 by District Attorney Craig Watkins. There are now more than 115 CIUs across the country. It is estimated that out of the 22 million people incarcerated in the United States, anywhere from 1% (roughly 22,000) to 5% (111,000) were wrongfully convicted.

[2] Id.

Andre Causey, *D-1-DC-91-915672-A, murder, sentenced to 50 years at trial, dismissed for Actual Innocence, 2025.*

In 2025, Mr. Causey was exonerated after spending 32 years in prison for a murder that he did not commit. In 1992, Mr. Causey was convicted of the brutal murder of Anita Byington, based on a confession that Mr. Causey signed while in police custody that was later proven false in material ways. There was no other evidence tying Mr. Causey to the crime—no witnesses, no fingerprints, no DNA.

Over the course of two years of post-conviction proceedings, an alternate suspect emerged—the last person known to have been with Ms. Byington on the night she was killed. This individual lied to both police and the jury about his whereabouts, appeared the next morning with an injured arm, and was found to have dumped Ms. Byington's car after her death. Forensic testing also revealed multiple semen stains from him on Ms. Byington's clothing. While Mr. Causey was wrongfully incarcerated for the crime, the alternate suspect was charged in separate cases involving violence against women and sexual assault.

The District Court recommended granting habeas corpus relief, citing the alternate suspect's false testimony and the State's failure to disclose evidence that the police officers who took Mr. Causey's confession had a history of coercing false confessions. The Court of Criminal Appeals granted habeas corpus relief based on the false testimony of the alternate suspect and remanded the case for further proceedings in the District Court. The Travis County District Attorney's Office moved to dismiss the case based on actual innocence, and the District Court granted the motion.

Alvin Stewart, *D-1-DC-02-904132-B, manslaughter and robbery, sentenced to 65 years at trial, new punishment hearing based on ineffective assistance of counsel, sentenced to time served & released, 2025.*

Mr. Stewart was released from prison as a result of post-conviction proceedings because the jury that convicted him had never heard the tragic story behind the crime that he had committed. In 2002, Mr. Stewart was convicted of manslaughter and robbery, and sentenced to 65 years in prison. What the jury did not know was that the decedent—the victim of the manslaughter—had groomed and sexually abused Alvin Stewart when Alvin was in middle school. The decedent had been a middle school guidance counselor who groomed and abused a "special" group of middle school students—members of a club he called the Pretty Boys. As a young man, and after years of secrecy and abuse, Alvin Stewart fatally struck his abuser after a sexual encounter, then left the home with a VCR from his abuser's home. Mr. Stewart was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the manslaughter, and, astonishingly, 65 years for the robbery.

This case came to the attention of the CIU through the prosecutor at trial. When the prosecutor learned the whole story behind the case, he contacted the CIU, asking for a full review. After investigating and ultimately litigating the case, the CIU agreed to sentencing relief, on the basis that Mr. Stewart's attorney was ineffective for failing to present evidence of sexual abuse to the jury during the punishment phase of trial. The Court of Criminal Appeals found that Mr. Stewart was entitled to a new punishment hearing, and remanded the case to Travis County for further proceedings. The Travis County District Attorney's Office requested that Mr. Stewart be sentenced to time served. The Honorable Karen Sage sentenced Mr. Stewart to time served, and ordered that Mr. Stewart remain at liberty on the case.

CIU Cases Pending Before the Court of Criminal Appeals and/or Federal Courts

Terrance Caesar, *D1-D-C-12-301418-A, burglary, sentenced to 18 years at trial.* TCDA agreed that Mr. Caesar was entitled to relief, and a District Court Judge has recommended relief, based on unreliable DNA testing conducted by the now-shuttered APD DNA lab as well as other related issues in the case.

Areli Escobar, *D1-D-C-09-301250-A, capital murder, sentenced to death.* The CIU litigated issues related to unreliable DNA testing from the now-shuttered APD DNA Lab as well as other issues in the case. Legal proceedings are ongoing.

Carmen Mejia, *D1-D-C-04-904057-B*, *murder/injury to a child, sentenced to life.* Testimony completed, TCDA has agreed to relief and District Court Judge has recommended relief. The basis of relief was new evidence indicating injury to child was accidental.

Marshall Moreno, *D1-D-C-01-303571-A, sexual assault of a child sentenced to 36 years at trial.* Testimony completed, primary witness recanted, TCDA has agreed to relief and District Court Judge has recommended relief. **The Court of Criminal Appeals vacated the conviction on the basis of Actual Innocence. The** case will be sent back to Travis County to be dismissed.

Michael Scott, Robert Springsteen, Maurice Pierce, and Forest Welborn. 1991 Yogurt Shop Murders.

CIU Cases Pending Before Travis County Criminal District Courts

Michael Highfill, *D1-D-C-98-983143-B, capital murder, sentenced to life in prison at trial.* Defense writ filed August 2025.

Pete Alejos, *D1-D-C-02-904019-A, capital murder, sentenced to life in prison at trial.* Defense writ filed in 2019, stayed for defense investigation, TCDA moved to lift the stay in 2024 and begin hearing evidence. Proceedings ongoing.

Marcus Rutherford*, D1-D-C-06-500113-A, capital murder/injury to a child*, *sentenced to life without parole.* Defense writ filed July 2025.

Zavian Thomas, *D1-D-C-06-301206-B, injury to a child, sentenced to 55 years at trial.* Defense writ filed January 2025.

Allen Grant*, D1-D-C-91-915-092*, *murder, sentenced to 75 years at trial.* Defense writ filed November 2025.

Open Investigations

The CIU is conducting independent investigations in five additional cases (four homicides and one sexual assault) in which defense has indicated they will be filing a writ of habeas corpus. This includes two cases in which defense has filed motions to test (or retest) DNA that may be dispositive of guilt or innocence.