



January 1, 2016

## **The Innocence Commission**

Governor Bruce Rauner has embraced the “executive” part of his title as Illinois’ chief executive. He signed several executive orders during his first few days in office in 2015 which outlined new ethics guidelines, tweaked state employment rules and froze spending.

On February 11, 2015, Governor Rauner signed Executive Order 14 (2015) establishing the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform. Comprised of more than two dozen criminal justice practitioners, lawmakers and policymakers, the Commission is charged with developing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to meet the goal of reducing Illinois’ prison population 25 percent by 2025.

Now Illinois is in the spotlight for both police and prosecutor misconduct. The United States Department of Justice is currently investigating the Chicago Police Department and the Cook County State's Attorney's office – both institutions have lost the trust of the public. Both public-funded agencies are responsible for public safety and a fair criminal justice system. Law enforcement officers and prosecutors are humans with the power to change lives and our society. It is only fair that we have a better system to assure fairness and justice for all citizens of our state. Being wrongfully convicted is unfair and it is un-American - we must have a system that will allow incorrect past convictions to be overturned.

The Innocence Project is a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals through DNA testing and reforming the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice. According to the Innocence Project, "DNA exonerations have grown across the country in recent years, and wrongful convictions have revealed disturbing fissures and trends in our criminal justice system. Together, these cases show us how the criminal justice system is broken – and how urgently it needs to be fixed." The Innocence Project goes on to say, "We should learn from the system’s failures. In each case where DNA has proven innocence beyond doubt, an overlapping array of contributing factors has emerged – from mistakes to misconduct to factors of race and class."

Governor Rauner should not stop with his Executive Order 14 (2015) which established the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform. As we begin 2016, I am urging the governor to use his power to issue an Executive Order to authorize the establishment of an Innocence Commission to be used by those individuals who feel they were wrongfully convicted of a crime they didn't commit.

I will write and file a House Joint Resolution to help to influence the vision, mission and goals of this Innocence Commission. It is unfair that we have a criminal justice system in which the wrongful convicted have to live with a criminal record for their entire lives. I will fight to help give the wrongfully convicted their freedom back in Illinois. People should not have to live under a government that ruins their lives without the possibility of true justice so they may exercise their basic human rights and the right to pursue life, liberty and happiness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District