



WRONGFUL CONVICTION OVERTURNED WITH HELP FROM OREGON INNOCENCE PROJECT

DNA EVIDENCE THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN REPORTED AT TIME OF TRIAL LEADS TO NICK
MCGUFFIN'S MANSLAUGHTER CONVICTION BEING VACATED BY AN OREGON COURT.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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No one is available for interview from OIP until 12.3.19.

PORTLAND, Ore. – A Coquille man has seen his manslaughter conviction overturned by a judge after almost a decade. Nick McGuffin was convicted by a non-unanimous jury in 2011 of the manslaughter of Leah Freeman in Coquille in Coos County in 2000. Mr. McGuffin has served nine years of a ten-year sentence.

Nick McGuffin's case was one of the first accepted by the Oregon Innocence Project when it was created in 2014. Attorney Janis Puracal left the Oregon Innocence Project last year to found the Forensic Justice Project and has continued working on the case with attorney Steve Wax and others at OIP and with attorney Ryan O'Connor of O'Connor Weber. For five years, Oregon Innocence Project staff, pro bono volunteers, and law students¹ have worked diligently on Nick McGuffin's case.

An Oregon State Police crime lab analyst found unknown male DNA on one of Leah Freeman's shoes during an investigation following her death. While the identity of the source is still not known, it is certain that it did not come from Nick McGuffin. This information was not reported to Mr. McGuffin's legal team at the time of his trial and a judge has now agreed it should have been.

¹ Law students who worked on this case for the Oregon Innocence Project are Zach Winston, Ann Marie Schott, Chelsea Sandbloom, Amy Saak, Christine Webb, Caitlin Skurky, Ben Scissors, and Joe Muldavin.

Prosecutors have a constitutionally required responsibility to disclose all evidence that may be exculpatory to defense attorneys.

“Nick’s case shows the critical importance of having access to all potentially exculpatory evidence in a case and, as Judge Sullivan noted, how not reporting everything can upend what we thought we knew, even many years later,” said Steve Wax.

“As in so many innocence cases, thousands upon thousands of hours of labor have gone into investigating to uncover evidence that would reveal the truth about what happened nineteen years ago: that Nick McGuffin did not kill Leah Freeman,” said Wax. “I particularly want to pay tribute to the efforts of our volunteer researcher John Comery, who has been dedicated to working on Nick’s case since we took it on.”

Nick McGuffin is the second Oregon Innocence Project client to see his conviction overturned. Last year, Josh Horner of Redmond, Oregon, had his conviction and 50-year sentence overturned by the Deschutes County Court. Both men were convicted by non-unanimous juries.

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For more information please contact Alice Lundell. We respectfully request that you do not use the shorthand “Innocence Project” to describe the Oregon Innocence Project because that is the name of another organization.