

FY 2012-2013 Annual Report

Innocence Project of Texas Clinic- Texas Tech School of Law

The 2012-2013 fiscal year saw many achievements for the Innocence Project of Texas (IPTX) Clinic at the Texas Tech University School of Law. During the year, 16 law students worked a total of 2080 hours. 24 students from the forensics science department worked a total of 1560 hours. These students worked alongside IPTX attorneys to screen cases and investigate claims of actual innocence. The \$80,000 provided in clinic funding was used to pay Nick Vilbas, Executive Director for IPTX, and part time interns. Vilbas is also the clinical course director and used the funds to conduct case investigations and used them for related litigation expenses. The part time interns assisted with intake, mail processing, and general clerical duties.

The clinic received a total of 924 requests for review this past fiscal year. Denials were sent to 1,173 people. This number is comprised of pre-questionnaire denials and post-screening denials, some of which were from cases where the request was received in the previous fiscal year. Questionnaires were sent to 415 individuals in an effort to learn more information about their cases. During this time, 407 were received back. We opened 35 new investigations and 34 were closed within the fiscal year. Of all requests received, 0 were referred to other institutions. Tech clinical students investigated these cases and were supervised by Nicholas Vilbas and by Jennifer Mirll, our new Case Director who started in March 2013. Natalie Roetzel has continued to be employed by IPTX as the full-time Chief Staff Attorney in Dallas, Texas.

One of the exciting developments during this fiscal year was the Statewide Arson Review. The review was begun during the previous fiscal year but a number of case

investigations were begun just prior to the beginning of the fiscal year or shortly thereafter. IPTX effectively screened 1,085 arson cases down to 35 needing investigation. Out of those cases, nine were selected for review by the State Fire Marshal's Office Science Advisory Workgroup (SAW). The SAW meets quarterly and first met in January 2013. So far the SAW has issued positive findings on three IPTX cases. Two of these cases were already in litigation and the third was moved to litigation after the close of the fiscal year. IPTX anticipates another 3-5 cases to receive positive findings from the SAW and will move to litigation at the appropriate time. This review is a testament to the power of stakeholders coming together to solve common problems in pursuit of justice. The State Fire Marshal's Office should be highly commended for their commitment to justice, not only for their participation in the Statewide Arson Review, but also for their effort to make Texas the national leader in fire investigations.

There were no exonerations achieved during the fiscal year but there are many currently in litigation, including the arson cases, which we hope will resolve in exoneration during the upcoming fiscal year.