

# DOES OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM CONVICT INNOCENT PEOPLE?

**Yes.** Our criminal justice system makes mistakes. When death is the punishment, the stakes are frighteningly high.



## Kansas Mistakes Lead to Wrongful Conviction Compensation Law: HB 2579

- **22 Kansas cases are listed in the National Registry of Exonerations.** These 22 were innocent yet sentenced to prison in Kansas. The cases are from thirteen different Kansas counties.<sup>1</sup>
- **5 Kansas first degree murder cases are in the Exoneration Registry:** Floyd Bledsoe (Jefferson); Lamonte McIntyre, Olin Coones, Cedric Warren, and Domonique Moore (all Wyandotte).<sup>2</sup> To date, Kansas has not had an exoneration of a death sentenced person.
- In 2018, the Legislature passed and Governor Colyer signed **HB 2579**, a **compensation bill** for persons who were innocent and sent to prison.

**22**

wrongful convictions  
in Kansas

*"Years taken from men and women who have been wrongfully convicted cannot be given back."*

Governor Jeff Colyer when signing HB 2579

## National Death Sentenced Exonerations Continue to Climb

- **201 persons who had been death sentenced** were released in the US from 1973 to 12/1/2025 due to wrongful conviction.<sup>3</sup>
- **1 out of every 25** people sentenced to death is most likely innocent.<sup>4</sup>
- **81%** of the states with the death penalty as of Dec. 1, 2025 have had an exoneration of a death sentenced person.<sup>5</sup>

**201**

U.S. death sentenced  
exonerations.

*Our system of justice is administered by human beings—judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, experts, members of law enforcement, and jurors—who make mistakes despite their best efforts and intentions."*

Harold Wilson, Kirk Bloodsworth and Ray Krone,  
death sentenced exonerees

## Death Sentence Exonerations 2015-2024: Contributing Causes

In the thirty five exonerations during the period 2015-2024, the leading contributing causes were:

- official misconduct—**89%**
- perjury or false accusation—**71%**
- false/misleading forensic evidence—**49%**
- inadequate legal defense—**46%**
- mistaken witness ID—**29%**
- False confession—**23%**

Some cases had multiple contributing causes.<sup>6</sup>

## Death Sentence Exonerations

### Cause

False Confession	Perjury/False Accusation	False/Misleading Forensic Evidence	Official Misconduct	Mistaken Eyewitness ID	Inadequate Legal Defense
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### Number

8	25	17	31	10	16
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## Executed Despite Strong Evidence of Innocence

21 persons are listed by The Death Penalty Information Center having been executed from 1983 to 2024 despite strong evidence of innocence. They were in 7 different states.<sup>7</sup>

The DA in Ruben Cantu's case, Sam Millsap, now admits he never should have sought death.<sup>8</sup>

In 2024, Marcellus Williams was executed in Missouri over the objections of the sitting St. Louis County prosecutor Wesley Bell. Mr. Bell believed there was "inexorable doubt on Mr. Williams' conviction and sentence."<sup>9</sup>



Ruben Cantu

*"Both of us have been involved in the execution of men who may well have been innocent."*

**former District Attorneys Sam Millsap and Grant Jones, Houston Chronicle 12/13/2012**

## HASN'T SCIENCE (DNA) ELIMINATED THE RISK OF WRONGFUL CONVICTION?

# NO!

New research has called into question the reliability of some use of DNA tests to definitively identify suspects in criminal investigations. DNA testing is a human endeavor, and therefore subject to human error just like everything else. It is quite useful in excluding individuals, but its reliability in identifying a perpetrator is far from perfect.

A mere **34 of the 201 exonerates** from death sentenced persons had DNA as a major factor in their exoneration.<sup>10</sup>

1. <https://exonerationregistry.org/cases>
2. <https://exonerationregistry.org/cases>
3. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence>
4. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Gross et al, March 25, 2014
5. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence>  
Of the 27 states with a current death penalty law, 22 have had an exoneration.
6. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/data/innocence>
7. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence/executed-but-possibly-innocent>
8. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence/executed-but-possibly-innocent>

9. [https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence/executed-but-possibly-innocent#Marcellus\\_Williams](https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence/executed-but-possibly-innocent#Marcellus_Williams)
10. <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence>

