



# State Attorney

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## **Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office Hosts Workshop on Wrongful Convictions Featuring Death Row Exonerees**

Tampa, Florida – On April 20, 2018, the Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office is pleased to host a workshop to address wrongful convictions in the criminal justice system. The workshop will include a panel of three exonerated death row survivors from Witness to Innocence (WTI), a national organization composed of exonerees dedicated to reducing the number of wrongful convictions in capital cases.

The workshop will engage in an in-depth analysis of the legal framework for exonerations and pitfalls common to wrongful convictions. Prosecutors from the State Attorney's Office will attend the workshop along with detectives and investigators from local law enforcement agencies, including the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

"A prosecutor's job is to seek justice, not merely just obtain convictions," said State Attorney Warren. "Wrongful convictions undermine the integrity of our criminal justice system. They punish the innocent while the actual perpetrators go free. The men and women of my office are committed to an open and honest conversation on these issues, which will serve to build a safer and stronger community."

Richard Dieter, the former Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, DC and an expert on capital exonerations, will facilitate the workshop, which will include presentations from death row exonerees Ray Krone, Randy Steidl and Sabrina Smith. The workshop will consist of two sessions: a detailed two-hour session for homicide prosecutors and law enforcement, and a more general one-hour session for other prosecutors.

State Attorney Warren has previously declared his intention to establish a Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU), a specialized section within the State Attorney's Office to identify and remedy wrongful convictions by conducting fact-based reviews of convicted defendants. Warren said, "Although CIUs have become common in major cities over the past decade, the idea is still new to Hillsborough. Bringing Witness To Innocence here so our

prosecutors can hear first-hand the stories of men and women who sat on death row for crimes they did not commit is an important first step in building a successful Conviction Integrity Unit.”

State Attorney Warren and the Witness to Innocence participants will be available for questions from the media prior to the start of the workshop on Friday, 4/20/18, at 12:45 p.m., at the George Edgecomb Courthouse Jury Auditorium, 800 E. Twiggs Street, Tampa, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor.

For more information, visit the State Attorney’s Office website at <http://sao13th.com> or email [communications@sao13th.com](mailto:communications@sao13th.com).

*The Office of the State Attorney, 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit is committed to making our county a safer place to live, work, and raise a family. It is our privilege and honor to service this community.*

### **Facilitator Bios**

#### **Richard Dieter**

*Richard Dieter received his law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center, where he was named a Public Interest Law Scholar. He served as the Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, D.C. from 1992 until 2015. He has authored 40 reports on the death penalty that have been widely cited in the national media and utilized at all levels of state and national government, including the U.S. Supreme Court. His most recent publication, **Battle Scars: Military Veterans and the Death Penalty (2015)**, received the Congressional Black Caucus’s Veterans Braintrust Award. He also served as an Adjunct Professor at the Catholic University School of Law for 14 years.*

#### **Ray Krone**

*In 1991, a woman was murdered in a Phoenix bar where Ray was an occasional customer, and he was arrested for the crime. The case against him was based largely on the testimony of an “expert” witness, later discredited, who claimed bite marks found on the victim matched Ray’s teeth. He was sentenced to death in 1992. In 1995, he received a new trial but was again found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. In 2002 his attorneys demonstrated that DNA found at the murder scene belonged to another man. Prosecutors dropped all charges against Ray, and he became the 100<sup>th</sup> person exonerated from death row in the United States since 1973. Ray Krone co-founded Witness to Innocence with Sister Helen Prejean in 2003.*

#### **Randy Steidl**

*Randy Steidl spent 17 years in Illinois prisons, including 12 on death row, prior to his exoneration. He was wrongly convicted and sentenced to die for a double murder committed in 1986. When questioned, Randy cooperated with the police and gave a corroborated alibi for the night of the murders. Randy had poor legal representation, and witnesses fabricated testimony against him due to police misconduct. An investigation by the Illinois State Police proved that local law enforcement and prosecutors had framed Randy. In 2003, a federal judge overturned Randy’s conviction and ordered a new trial. The state reinvestigated the case, tested DNA evidence, and found no link to him. All charges were dismissed in 2004.*

#### **Sabrina Smith**

*Sabrina Smith was a Mississippi teenager who was convicted of murder and child abuse in the death of her nine-month-old son. In 1989, Sabrina rushed her son to the hospital after he suddenly stopped breathing. Doctors had*

*attempted to resuscitate the child for thirty minutes, but failed, and Sabrina's baby died the next day. The day of her son's death, Sabrina was arrested for child abuse due to the bruises left by her resuscitation attempts. At the trial, prosecutors sought to prove that Sabrina's account of the events leading to her son's death were false, and that she had inflicted the fatal wounds intentionally. Sabrina did not testify at her trial, and was convicted of both murder and child abuse, becoming the only woman on Mississippi's Death Row at the time. The Mississippi courts reversed her conviction in 1992, declaring that the prosecution had failed to prove that the incident was anything more than an accident. In 1995, Sabrina was retried. The medical examiner changed his opinion about her son's cause of death, which he newly attributed to a kidney malady. In 1995, Sabrina was acquitted of all charges. She is one of only two women in the United States exonerated from death row.*

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