


Unprecedented Collaboration: NCIP presents at CDAА Conviction Review Forum

July 29, 2016 (<http://law.scu.edu/northern-california-innocence-project/unprecedented-collaboration-ncip-presents-at-cdaa-conviction-review-forum/>)  Audrey Redmond (<http://law.scu.edu/author/alredmond/>)

By Lucy Salcido Carter

In an unprecedented collaboration among California-based innocence projects and the California District Attorneys Association (CDAА), NCIP presented at a training forum for California prosecutors on June 27, 2016. The CDAА and the San Diego County District Attorney's Office (SDCDA) co-sponsored the forum held in San Diego on post-conviction review programs. (<http://law.scu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2d79f4b4-9ecd-4962-9d02-fb87223cf12f.jpg>)

Nearly 50 prosecutors participated in the forum, including five elected district attorneys. NCIP helped shape the day's agenda, which focused on the nuts and bolts of post-conviction review, and included several opportunities for NCIP and the California Innocence Project (CIP) to share the innocence projects' perspective with prosecutors.

To set the tone for the day, former prosecutor and NCIP volunteer attorney Karyn Sinunu-Towery and NCIP advisory board member Rick Walker presented "Anatomy of a Wrongful Conviction" in the morning, walking prosecutors through Walker's case, conviction, and exoneration. Walker described the feelings and experiences he and his family went through during the conviction and as they fought for his freedom. Sinunu-Towery highlighted how as a career prosecutor she had not really believed that wrongful convictions could occur, until she investigated Walker's case. She also emphasized the need to put "fresh eyes" on each conviction being reviewed.

Other morning presentations included opening remarks from CDAА CEO Mark Zahner, a presentation by Prosecutor's Center for Excellence Executive Director Kristine Hamann on the role prosecutors can play in effective post-conviction review, and a panel with representatives from five California conviction review units (CRUs).

During lunch, prosecutors met in break-out sessions based on county size and discussed their current processes for handling innocence claims and how they might improve their processes. In report-backs from the break-out sessions, prosecutors noted the value of CRUs but also recognized the likely resistance from colleagues. High-ranking, well-respected prosecutors should lead CRUs to build buy-in and support, they said.

In the afternoon, NCIP Executive Director Hadar Harris and CIP Executive Director Justin Brooks shared information about innocence projects' rigorous case screening and investigation procedures. Harris also highlighted the opportunity CRUs create for collaboration.

The day closed with a panel moderated by NCIP Policy Director Lucy Salcido Carter which featured examples of NCIP and CIP collaboration with district attorney's offices. Panelists included NCIP Staff Attorney Melissa O'Connell and Alameda County Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Catherine Kobal. Both emphasized the importance of building trust over time and being clear about when they agree or do not agree on aspects of a case.

The collaboration will continue after the forum; SCCDA DDA Bryn Kirvin, who spearheaded the forum, and Carter will co-write an article for CDAА's *Prosecutor's Brief* capturing the many lessons learned from the day.

The idea for the Conviction Review Forum grew from conversations between NCIP attorneys and SDCDA prosecutors after NCIP's "In the Interest of Justice: Conviction Review Programs" symposium last September. To view video of the September symposium visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRp58PVwiV8> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRp58PVwiV8>).

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