

PA Innocence Project at Temple Law Wins New Trial for Wrongfully Convicted Pittsburgh Man

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The **Pa Innocence Project** at Temple Law has won a new trial for Greg Brown, convicted of arson and second degree murder eighteen years ago for a fire that killed three Pittsburgh firefighters. In a sharp rebuke to the federal government's actions in investigating the worst tragedy in Pittsburgh Fire Department history, Judge Joseph Williams today ordered that Brown's conviction be vacated and a new trial held.

Eighteen years ago, Brown was convicted of setting the fire that took the lives of three Pittsburgh fire fighters on February 14, 1995. In ordering a new trial for Brown, who was 17 when sentenced to life without parole, Judge Williams ruled that the government intentionally withheld information critical to the jury's verdict: that the only two witnesses to inculcate Brown did so while expecting to receive thousands of dollars in cash for their testimony. Judge Williams called this an "egregious lapse in judgment" made Brown's trial "so unfair [that] the Court does not have confidence in the guilt determination."

A dogged investigation begun by veteran journalist Bill Moushey of Point Park University years after Brown's conviction uncovered the \$15,000 in payments to the witnesses. The Pennsylvania Innocence Project, through local pro bono counsel Dave Fawcett and Jason Hazlewood of Reed Smith, tracked down evidence that the key witnesses against Brown, including a troubled 15 year old, testified expecting thousands of dollars in reward money from federal investigators - and that neither the jury, the judge or Greg Brown's trial counsel were told of the arrangement. Although not part of the hearing, the Pennsylvania Innocence Project also consulted international fire experts who believe the fire was likely not an arson at all, but a horrible tragedy with no attributable fault.

"The conduct of the federal government that led to Greg Brown's conviction was atrocious," said Mr. Fawcett. "This fire was a tragic accident, and the firefighters died heroically trying to save the lives of everyone inside that house. But there was no arson here. Mr. Brown had nothing to do with this tragedy; now he will have a fair chance of proving that in court."

Pennsylvania Innocence Project Legal Director Marissa Bluestine noted that this is the first Pittsburgh case brought through to a hearing by the small independently-funded non-profit organization. It is the third grant of a new trial for clients of the Project in four months.

Written by Temple Law School