

PENNSYLVANIA  
INNOCENCE  
PROJECT



2016  
ANNUAL REPORT



## LEADERSHIP TRANSITION



This leadership team represents the continuity of the past with an eye to the future. From left to right are: David Richman, 2016 Board President and current Board member; Richard Glazer, founding Executive Director retiring in 2017; Marissa Boyers Bluestine, 2016 Legal Director and current Executive Director; and Howard Scher, long-time Board member and 2017 Board President.

## PRESIDENT PENNSYLVANIA INNOCENCE PROJECT

When 2016 began, Tyrone Jones, Crystal Weimer, and Donte Rollins were all long-time prisoners of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—for crimes they had not committed. Mr. Jones was in his 43rd year of incarceration, Ms. Weimer, her tenth, and Mr. Rollins his eighth. Sixty-one years of wrongful imprisonment, all told.

### Mission Accomplished, and Accomplished, and Accomplished

When 2016 ended, each had been freed. Except for Mr. Jones, all had been exonerated, an outcome to which Mr. Jones, who was released on parole, is surely entitled and will one day enjoy. The three owe their freedom to an array of pro bono lawyers—Hayes Hunt, Jeff Bresch and Katie Matscherz, and Michael Wiseman—who, along with our own staff, were as tenacious and resourceful as the best practitioners you ever saw at play in the fields of the law.



Considering the thinness and dubiousness of the evidence that convicted the three, and the length of time and enormous effort required to remove the scales that blinded the eyes of justice to their innocence, the state of the criminal justice system makes one weep. When, on the other hand, one reflects on the determination of our lawyers and investigators—Marissa and Nilam, Shaina and Nick—to right injustice, and on the extraordinary grace of the clients when they emerged into the light, well, that, too, is enough to make one cry. How not to be stirred by the sight of small-minded, heartless institutions being resisted and overcome by large-souled human beings.

Judged on the freedom gained for Messrs. Jones, Rollins, and Ms. Weimer, the mission of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project was served extremely well in 2016. So, too, was the institution built to serve the mission. In 2016, the Project opened a Pittsburgh office, founded an organization of young professionals who share a passion for innocence, and designed a new structure with a new team to lead the Project beginning in 2017.

### We Span the State

During our gestation period as an organization, we were the “Philadelphia Innocence Project.” A wise person counseled that there were benefits to being identified with the state more so than with the City of Philadelphia. Maybe call the new entry in the innocence movement, “The Keystone Innocence Project.” When we incorporated in 2008 we did so as “The Pennsylvania Innocence Project.”

Until 2016, however, we were state-wide in name only. In 2016 we accepted the invitation of Duquesne Law School to establish on its campus an office and innocence clinic to instruct and train Duquesne and Pitt Law School students. We then hit the jackpot with the hiring of former Federal Public Defender Liz DeLosa to staff the office and clinic. The Pittsburgh legal community welcomed us in style with a spectacular reception in September hosted by PNC at the new PNC Tower. Our Board now includes two prominent members of the Pittsburgh bar, another facet of the Board's increasing diversity.

### Advocates for Innocence

One sign of the Project's impact has been the enthusiasm it has engendered for the mission, especially among young lawyers. To capitalize on that enthusiasm and, at the same time, cultivate future Board members, we formed Advocates for Innocence as a committee with 15 members. With guidance and support from our staff, the Advocates will dedicate themselves to innocence-related projects of their choosing, learn the mechanics of public interest law firm operation and management, and augment the Project's Board in advancing the Project's mission.

### The Leadership Transition

Richard Glazer's advice that 2016 would be his last full year of service as the Project's Executive Director and that our Development Director Bill Babcock would be retiring in the first quarter of 2017 sharpened our collective attention to transition planning. The happy outcome of the efficient planning process was the adoption of a new management structure, the decision to elevate Marissa from Legal Director to Executive Director on Richard's retirement in 2017, and Howard Scher's acceptance of the role of the Board President, effective January 1, 2017.

Richard, of course, has been a model Executive Director for the length of the Project's life. Besides his many tangible contributions, his stature within the community has added immeasurably to the Project's. For the past nine years it has been my pleasure and good fortune, and that of the entire Board, to collaborate with Richard on realizing our vision of a world-class innocence organization. Richard's legacy is the imprint left on the Project of his professionalism, kindness, and class.

As I yield the floor to Howard, as well as the prerogative of penning future president's letters, I do so with pride and satisfaction in what a truly marvelous group of men and women—Board, staff, volunteer lawyers, and supporters—has managed to accomplish in so short a period of time. But congratulations—self and otherwise—have to give way to the acknowledgement that the crest of the hill is still a long way away. Join me, won't you, in continuing the climb.

*David Richmond*

2016 Board President, Pennsylvania Innocence Project

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Crystal Weimer

**Tyrone Jones** was 16 years old when police arrested him in Philadelphia for the murder of Henry Harrison. Police estimated there were 30 to 60 people on the scene when they arrived, though no witnesses were named, and no eyewitnesses testified at trial. The information circulated by police described a suspect wearing a red skull cap, though someone a half-foot taller than Tyrone. Tyrone was arrested outside his home, about nine blocks from where the crime took place. Police interrogated him without a parent or attorney present. The police neither conducted further investigation nor interviewed any of the 30-60 witnesses.

The Project found and spoke with four eyewitnesses to Harrison's murder; they all remembered details from that night. All four said they did not see Tyrone anywhere in the area at the time of the crime. After 40 years in prison, Tyrone's sentence was reduced to 35 years to life and he was released on parole in part due to his exemplary behavior. "While we remain committed to proving Tye's innocence, we are thrilled to welcome him home," said his attorney, Cozen O'Connor Partner Hayes Hunt. This representation has been through the Cozen O'Connor pro bono program along with the Pennsylvania Innocence Project. "Tye has been a pillar of strength throughout his ordeal," Hunt said.



Donte Rollins and his mother Ava



## CLIENTS RELEASED IN 2016

**Crystal Weimer** was exonerated on June 27, 2016, after the Fayette County District Attorney withdrew all charges. Crystal served 11 years for a murder she didn't commit. When she was incarcerated, she left behind three young daughters who had little access to their mother for all those years – years that can't be made up.

Crystal was wrongly convicted for the 2001 murder of Curtis Haith who was beaten and shot. A key piece of evidence used against her was a supposed bite mark on the victim's hand. Two jailhouse witnesses claimed she confessed to them, both of whom had written to the prosecutor asking for deals for themselves or relatives, although the prosecutor told the jury neither had anything to gain from their testimony. A third witness accused Crystal of participating in the murder in exchange for a plea to third-degree murder and a reduced sentence. The Project worked with the Federal Community Defender and attorneys from Jones Day in post-conviction challenges that established the bite mark evidence was junk science and cannot be used for identification. She was released in October 2015.



**Tyrone Jones**

When a nine-year-old boy in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion was shot and critically injured, **Donte Rollins** was miles away at the mall with friends. He had store receipts and was on video at more than one location, but the jury did not see or hear this evidence. He was convicted and sentenced to 62 and one-half to 125 years in prison.

After 10 years of wrongful incarceration, Donte asked attorney Michael Wiseman to represent him, who then asked the Project to help. In a post-conviction challenge, the team was able to present all the evidence the first jury should have heard. Prosecutors eventually agreed that Donte received ineffective assistance from his trial counsel and that his conviction should be vacated. Still, the judge denied the petition. On appeal to Superior Court, the judges reversed the previous PRCA judge's decision and remanded the case to the Court of Common Pleas with orders to vacate the conviction and release Donte to house arrest. The Philadelphia District Attorney withdrew charges, and said it would have been "impossible" for Donte to have committed the crime. Donte's conviction was vacated, and all charges withdrawn on December 20, 2016.

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## PITTSBURGH MANAGING ATTORNEY

From the day we opened our doors here at Duquesne University's Tribone Center for Clinical Legal Education, we have been enthusiastically welcomed by the Western Pennsylvania community.



We have had the privilege of working with hundreds of this community's outstanding professionals, students, and residents in the pursuit of true justice, including;

- law clinics for Duquesne and Pitt students (*pictured left*);
- 150 Western Pennsylvania *pro bono* attorneys;
- 10 Western Pennsylvania law firms;
- 30 volunteers from all walks of life;
- 50 forensic scientists;
- 26 trained students from numerous area universities and law schools; and
- 8 nationally renowned experts who have agreed to provide their expertise on a *pro bono* or reduced fee basis.

In conjunction with our Western Pennsylvania *pro bono* partners, the Project has agreed to represent five Western Pennsylvania inmates in their pursuit to prove innocence. We are actively vetting another 25 cases and have successfully located potential biological evidence in six cases that may now be subjected to modern day DNA testing methodologies.

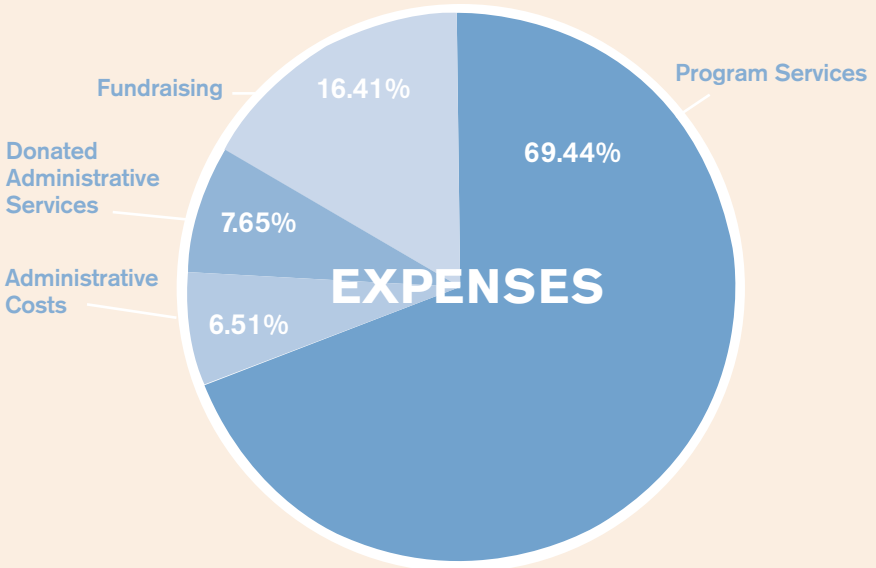
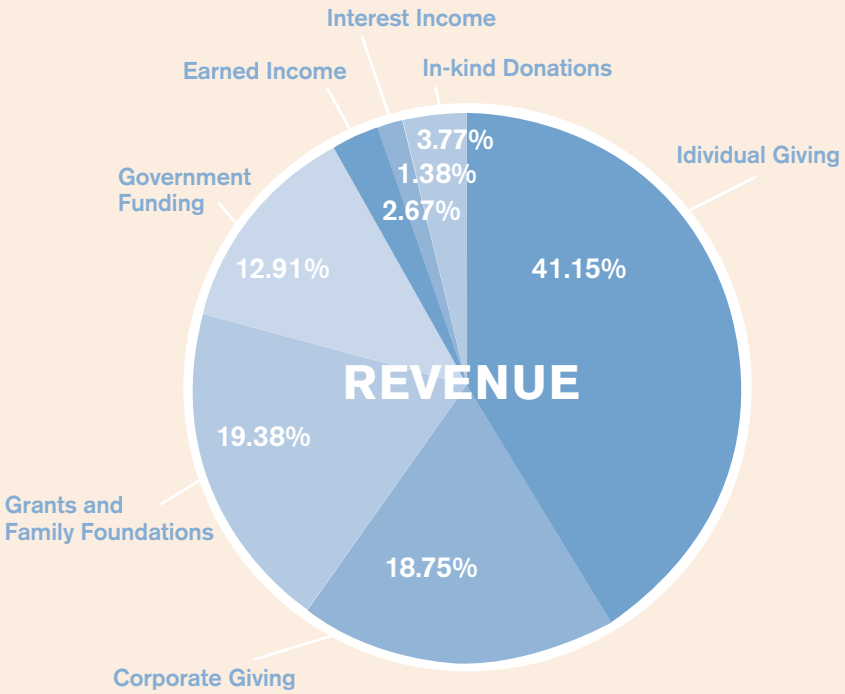
We are beyond grateful for the outpouring of enthusiasm and support by this community and cannot wait to see all that we are able to accomplish in the year ahead.

Liz DeLosa









## 2016 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### REVENUE

Individual Giving	\$285,569	41.15%
Corporate Giving	\$130,120	18.75%
Grants and Family Foundations	\$134,465	19.38%
Government Funding	\$ 89,585	12.91%
Earned Income	\$ 18,500	2.67%
Interest Income	\$ 9,575	1.38%
In-kind Donations	\$ 26,162	3.77%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$693,976</b>	

### EXPENSES

Program Services	\$444,986	69.44%
Administrative Costs	\$ 41,720	6.51%
Dontated Administrative Services	\$ 49,000	7.65%
Fundraising	\$105,133	16.41%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$640,839</b>	
Year-end net assets	\$838,388	
Change in net assets	\$ 84,305	

*For greater detail you are welcome to review our 990 on [www.GuideStar.org](http://www.GuideStar.org)*

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