



State Appellate Defender Office

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Duane Williams set for release after more than 11 years in prison

DETROIT, MI – State Appellate Defender Office (SADO) client Duane Williams will be released from prison after he spent more than 11 years incarcerated for wrongful arson and murder convictions.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Bradley Cobb vacated his convictions and sentences and granted a personal recognizance bond while the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office continues to review the case during a new pre-trial period. Alleged to have started a house fire that killed two people, Mr. Williams was serving a life sentence for felony murder.

The evidence used to convict Mr. Williams featured the all too common dynamics of a wrongful conviction:

- An unreliable jailhouse informant claimed that Mr. Williams confessed to starting the fire.
- An interview that contradicted the informant’s testimony was not provided to the defense at trial. And new evidence, including a \$5,000 reward that the informant received after trial, casts further doubt on that testimony.
- At trial, the State’s fire investigator testified that there were no smoking materials found near the fire’s area of origin. The defense received neither a report nor photographs showing a Zippo style lighter, a “smoking material” that was found near the fire’s origin.
- An expert in the cause and origin of fires never examined and rebutted the prosecutor’s theory that the fire was intentionally set. A fire investigator consulted by SADO has stated that an accident cannot be ruled out as the cause of fire.

“Duane has been unjustly imprisoned and fighting for his freedom for more than 11 years. Thanks to his perseverance and intellect, Duane’s unconstitutional convictions came to the attention of SADO, the Cooley Innocence Project, Clemency Investigations, and the Conviction Integrity Unit at the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office. After so many years, we are pleased that he won some relief,” said SADO Assistant Defender Maya Menlo, his attorney. “Mr. Williams is looking forward to

rejoining his family and getting his life back together. We are grateful to the Wayne County Prosecutor for working with us to vacate these convictions.”

SADO collaborated with the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office Conviction Integrity Unit and the Western Michigan University Cooley Law School Innocence Project to secure relief for Mr. Williams. The parties stipulated to vacate Mr. Williams’ convictions and sentences.

Michigan’s State Appellate Defender Office is the oldest and largest public defender office in the state. Enacted by statute in 1979, SADO provides zealous representation to indigent individuals appealing their felony convictions. To learn more, visit sado.org.

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Enclosure: Stipulated Order to Vacate Convictions and Sentences Without Prejudice