



ORANGE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

CONVICTION INTEGRITY UNIT – CASE REVIEW POLICY

I.

INTRODUCTION

The wrongful conviction of any person should be every prosecutor's greatest concern. A prosecutor's highest priority should be ensuring innocent people are never prosecuted and that every conviction is arrived at through the just enforcement of the law. Even "after a conviction the prosecutor ... is bound by the ethics of his office to inform the appropriate authority of ... information that casts doubt upon the correctness of a conviction." (*Imbler v. Patchman* (1976) 424 U.S. 409, 427, fn. 25; *People v. Garcia* (1993) 17 Cal.App.4th 1169, 1179; California State Bar, Rules of Professional Conduct 3.8(f), (g).) The Orange County District Attorney's Office ("OCDA") strives to uphold its duty to protect the innocent before, during and after trial and to honor the established rights of all defendants. This evaluation always commences from the time a case is presented to the OCDA through final adjudication and beyond.

The Conviction Integrity Unit ("CIU") of the OCDA investigates claims of factual innocence and/or wrongful conviction regarding defendants convicted in the County of Orange, California.

A defendant, attorney, law enforcement agency or judicial officer seeking to have a conviction reviewed should complete the Conviction Integrity Intake Form and submit it to the OCDA. The Conviction Integrity Intake form is available online at: <http://www.orangecountyda.org/ciu>. Please submit completed forms via regular mail or email to:

Conviction Integrity Unit
Orange County District Attorney's Office
P.O. Box 808
Santa Ana, CA 92701
ciu@ocdapa.org

II.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

This written policy is intended to ensure that the OCDA has a written and well-defined policy outlining the OCDA's procedure to review claims of factual innocence and/or wrongful conviction. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the OCDA analyzes all claims of factual innocence and/or wrongful conviction in a fair and uniform manner.

The OCDA is firmly and unequivocally committed to upholding the established rights of every defendant. This policy is not intended to create or confer any additional rights, privileges, or benefits to defendants other than those that are already mandated by existing constitutional, statutory, and decisional law.

III.

THE POLICY

The CIU is responsible for reviewing qualifying post-conviction claims of factual innocence and/or wrongful conviction. The CIU is a stand-alone unit of the OCDA staffed by dedicated senior attorneys and investigators who have extensive career experience with the most serious and complex cases. The CIU is supervised by an Assistant District Attorney who is a manager in OCDA and reports directly to the executive management team and the District Attorney.

A. **Standard of Review**

The OCDA will analyze claims of factual innocence and/or wrongful conviction to determine whether there is a loss of confidence in the conviction. When determining whether there is a loss of confidence in the conviction, the OCDA will consider whether there is clear and convincing evidence establishing that the defendant was convicted of an offense that he or she did not commit¹ or was otherwise wrongfully convicted.²

¹ Rule of Professional Conduct 3.8(g).

² Wrongful conviction includes cases involving potential violations of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

B. Application Criteria

1. The underlying conviction on the case applicant is claiming factual innocence or wrongful conviction occurred in Orange County;
2. There must be a claim of factual innocence or wrongful conviction. The request must raise a meaningful claim of factual innocence or wrongful conviction and not be merely a request for re-sentencing, a re-weighting of conflicting evidence or relief from collateral consequences;
3. Applicant bears the burden to present new, credible, and material evidence that was not presented to the jury or was unknown to the defense at time of disposition, including via new technology that exists to test or re-test evidence;
4. Applicant agrees to fully cooperate with CIU and law enforcement in the investigation;
5. Applicant or designee must complete the Conviction Integrity Intake Form and submit it to the OCDA.

Priority will be given to applicants who are in custody on the case applicant is claiming factual innocence or wrongful conviction. The OCDA will exercise its discretion to analyze a claim of factual innocence or wrongful conviction that falls outside the above criteria if the OCDA finds that the interests of justice demand review of that conviction.³

IV.

SCREENING APPLICATIONS

The CIU will review all claims submitted to determine if they meet the application criteria and have merit. When determining whether a claim has merit, the OCDA will consider whether a claim alleges new, credible and material evidence creating a reasonable likelihood that a convicted defendant did not commit an offense for which he or she was convicted⁴ or was otherwise wrongfully convicted. Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to, the evidence of guilt, plausibility of claims, whether the issues were previously investigated or litigated, and whether additional testing or investigation would be helpful in resolving the claims/issues.

³ This includes, but is not limited to, those instances that would be governed by Rule of Professional Conduct 3.8(f)(2)(ii) but would not otherwise qualify under the criteria of this policy.

⁴ Rule of Professional Conduct 3.8(f).

Decisions as to whether the CIU will re-open the case investigation, how the claim will be investigated, and how the claim will be resolved are made in the exercise of the OCDA's sole discretion, and are not reviewable by any court. There is no timeframe by which claims presented to the CIU will be resolved, but the OCDA will make every effort to expedite resolution of each claim while ensuring a complete and comprehensive review and analysis of the new, credible and material evidence presented.

The OCDA will let any Habeas Corpus and other post-conviction proceedings already in progress conclude prior to analyzing any claim of factual innocence or wrongful conviction, or request that the Habeas Corpus or other proceedings be stayed or tolled.

V.

INITIAL CASE REVIEW

If the submission fails to meet the application criteria, the CIU will notify the applicant or his or her attorney, if any. If the submission appears to meet the specified criteria, the CIU will conduct a review of the case file to determine if potential merit to the claim exists. The CIU may request clarification from or pose questions to the applicant or his or her attorney during the case file review. The OCDA will also request the preservation of all evidence by the appropriate law enforcement agencies during pendency of the case file review.

If after review of the case file, no merit for the claim exists, the matter will be closed and the CIU will notify the applicant and/or his or her attorney. If during the review of a case file it is determined that additional discovery or other legally required disclosures to the defense are necessary, such discovery/disclosure shall be made irrespective of the outcome of the case review.

VI.

CASE INVESTIGATION

If a claim is determined to have merit, the OCDA will open an investigation into the case, which may include, but is not limited to, soliciting information from the applicant and his or her attorney, reviewing all evidence, conducting forensic testing, and interviewing witnesses.

If an investigation is opened, the CIU will notify the applicant and/or his or her attorney, if any, as well as the victim(s), the original prosecutor(s)⁵ assigned to the case, and the law enforcement agency that originally investigated the case of its intention to investigate the applicant's claim(s). The time and manner of the notification to the victim or victim's family will be handled in the discretion of the CIU and in compliance with applicable law.⁶ The original prosecutor(s) as well as the supervisor of the unit where the case was assigned at the time of its prosecution will be notified of the claim and may be consulted. However, in order to ensure an impartial investigation of every qualifying claim presented, neither the original prosecutor(s) nor the supervisor of the unit where the matter was prosecuted will be involved in the investigation of the case conducted by the CIU. The CIU will attempt to work with the applicant and his or her attorney whenever possible in a cooperative and collaborative manner.

VII.

CONVICTION REVIEW COMMITTEE

The CIU will report the findings of all investigations to the Conviction Review Committee ("CRC"). The CRC shall consist of the Chief Assistant District Attorney, the Senior Assistant District Attorney responsible for supervising the CIU, the Senior Assistant District Attorney responsible for supervising the unit where the case originated, and a member of the criminal defense bar and/or a former judicial officer. The CRC will present a recommendation to the District Attorney, who will make the final determination whether there is a loss of confidence in the conviction.

VIII.

DECISION & NOTIFICATION

The OCDA will notify the applicant or his or her attorney, the victim(s) or victim(s)' family, the original prosecutor, and the affected law enforcement agencies of the final decision. If the District Attorney has lost confidence in the conviction, the OCDA will assist the defense as expeditiously as possible in any Habeas Corpus proceedings and in any exoneration process,

⁵ The term "original prosecutor(s)" as used in this policy refers to the prosecutor(s) assigned to the case at the time of its adjudication by verdict or plea.

⁶ Victims have a right to notice of post-conviction proceedings that may result in a defendant's release. (Cal. Const. Art I, § 28(b)(7).)

including seeking a finding of factual innocence, if appropriate. The OCDA may also seek to assist the applicant with his or her claim for compensation, if any, pursuant Penal Code §§ 4900-4906 where and as appropriate.

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