

News Release

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From the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission
Kendra Montgomery-Blinn, Executive Director

North Carolina Makes Legal History

Innocence Commission Conducts First Hearing and Case is Referred to Three-Judge Panel

RALEIGH, NC - The newly created North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission voted in favor of sending its first case on for further review. In a closed hearing on Friday, the Commission considered the case of *State v. Henry Reeves*. Mr. Reeves was convicted of taking indecent liberties with a child in Pitt County in 2001.

In 1999, Henry Reeves, then a police officer, was accused of molesting his daughter. Mr. Reeves pleaded not guilty to the charge and was tried twice in 2001. The first trial resulted in a hung jury and Mr. Reeves was convicted at the second trial. Mr. Reeves served two years in prison.

The Commission's Executive Director, Kendra Montgomery-Blinn, is unable to discuss the specific evidence in this case because it is a pending case. She noted, "This is the type of case that the Commission was created for. It involved a detailed and lengthy investigation that could only have been completed with the subpoena power granted to the Commission." The bulk of the evidence consisted of witnesses who did not testify at trial, but have since come forward.

Ms. Montgomery-Blinn went on to state that she enjoyed working with the Pitt County District Attorney's Office and the Pitt County Sheriff's Department. She remarked, "They were extremely helpful and cooperative with our investigation. The new evidence in this case was not available to them at the time of the trial and this was the first they had heard of it."

The Commission only considered evidence that was not heard by the jury. After hearing all the evidence, a majority of the Commissioners voted to send this case forward. The next step will be a public hearing in Pitt County Superior Court. Three judges will hear the case and, by unanimous vote, could dismiss the charges against Mr. Reeves.

The Innocence Inquiry Commission was established last year by the General Assembly as a means to investigate claims of actual innocence by convicted people. The Commission consists of eight members, all of whom were appointed by either the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court or the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals. The Commission members include Judge Quentin T. Sumner (Superior Court Judge), William Kenerly (District Attorney), Wade Smith (Defense Attorney), Mel Laura Chilton (Victim's Advocate), Barbara Pickens (Retired Sheriff), Jacqueline Greenlee (Public Member), Charles Becton (Attorney), and Heath Jenkins (Police Chief).

North Carolina is the first state to create this type of Innocence Commission, although other states have proposed similar legislation. The Commission's Chairman, Judge Quentin T. Sumner said, "The Commission members are aware that they have just made legal history. This is the first time that a hearing of this type has ever been conducted in the United States."

For more information, please contact the Commission's Executive Director, Kendra Montgomery-Blinn, at (919) 890-1580 or Kendra.A.Montgomery@nccourts.org

Ms. Montgomery-Blinn is unable to comment on the facts of the case because it is a pending case, but all of the documents that the Commission used to reach their decision are available to the media. A transcript of the hearing is being prepared and the media may order their own copy as well.

The Commission members have indicated that they will not discuss the case with the media, please do not contact them directly.