

News Release

For release Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at Noon E.D.T.

**From the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission
The Honorable Quentin T. Sumner, Chairman**

Innocence Commission Names Durham Assistant D.A. as its Executive Director

Kendra Montgomery-Blinn is Three-Year Veteran Prosecuting Domestic Violence Cases and Volunteered as Law Student for The Innocence Project

RALEIGH, N.C. – The Innocence Inquiry Commission announced Monday that it has appointed Kendra Montgomery-Blinn, an Assistant District Attorney from Durham, as its Executive Director.

Ms. Montgomery-Blinn has dedicated the last three years of her professional service to the Durham District Attorney's office, where she concentrated on overseeing domestic violence cases. She is a graduate of Purdue University, where she studied political science, and received her law degree from Duke University's School of Law. While attending Duke, Ms. Montgomery-Blinn volunteered to investigate inmate claims of innocence for the law school's Innocence Project, and in her final year became the Project's Student Director.

The Innocence Commission's Chairman, the Honorable Quentin T. Sumner, said that while it may have taken the commission longer than expected to find and hire its director, patience paid off in the end. "Of all the applicants we reviewed and

interviewed, Ms. Montgomery-Blinn initially stood out as possessing a balanced combination of the administration and legal skills needed to do the commission's work," the Superior Court Judge from Nash County said. "Moreover, it's clear from both her work history and our discussions with her, Ms. Montgomery-Blinn has neither a political agenda nor an ax to grind. She's seen, and experienced, how criminal law works from both sides of the fence." Including her years as a law student, Ms. Montgomery-Blinn has dedicated her legal career to criminal issues, dividing her time and efforts between defendants and victims of violent crime.

"I plan to draw from both my experience as a prosecutor and from my innocence project work to carefully evaluate the facts in each inmate's case," Ms. Montgomery-Blinn told reporters. "As our legislature noted when it established the commission last year, the criminal conviction of an innocent person is a profound problem and I am proud to be part of a possible solution."

Ms. Montgomery-Blinn, who lives with her husband and five-month-old baby in Durham, will initially head an office contingent of three commission staff members that will operate out of the new North Carolina Judicial Center in Raleigh. Among the director's first duties will be to hire a staff attorney/investigator and a paralegal or administrative assistant. In addition, the new director will work with a commission subcommittee on establishing operating rules and investigation procedures. Judge Sumner and Ms. Montgomery-Blinn each said they expected to begin considering inmate petitions sometime early this Summer. Over 100 inmates have sought to have their cases reviewed since the petition process opened back in the Fall of 2006.

The Innocence Inquiry Commission was established last year by the General Assembly as a means to investigate claims of actual innocence by inmates convicted of crimes. It is the first commission of its type in the United States. It consists of eight members, all of who were appointed by either the Chief Judge (of the Court of Appeals) or the Chief Justice (of the North Carolina Supreme Court). In addition to Judge Sumner, panel members include William Kenerly (District Attorney), Mel Laura Chilton (Victim's Advocate), Barbara Pickens (Sheriff Representative), Jackie Greenlee (Public member), Charles Becton (Attorney), Wade Smith (Attorney), and Heath Jenkins (Police Chief).

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***Please also contact Mr. Reinhartsen if you would like to question
either Judge Sumner or Kendra Montgomery-Blinn.***