

The North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission Rules and Procedures

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These Rules and Procedures (Rules) were adopted by the members of the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission (Commission) pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460-1475 to serve as a guideline for all functions of the Commission and the Commission staff. These Rules may be altered, amended, and updated as needed by a majority vote of the Commission. These Rules will be reviewed annually for any necessary updates and changes.

An appendix of tables and forms and annotations prepared by the drafting sub-committee may be attached to the Rules. These references are not an authoritative source on parity with the Rules and are published to aid in understanding and utilizing the Rules.

The Commission contemplates that exceptions to the Rules may arise. Any action taken by the Commission or the Commission staff that is not in compliance with the Rules shall be approved by the Commission Chair and in no way conflict with the provisions of N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460-1475.

In the event that a rule presents two meanings, the appendix may be referred to as a reference to the intent behind the rule. A conflicting rule shall be brought to the attention of the Commission for possible modification.

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The North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission Rules and Procedures

Preamble

History of the Commission

In November 2002, in response to concern about decreased public confidence in the justice system after several highly publicized exoneration cases, the North Carolina Chief Justice's Criminal Justice Study Commission¹; was established by Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake, Jr. The Commission was established to provide a forum for education and dialog between representatives from the different perspectives of the criminal justice system regarding causation issues in wrongful convictions.

One of the first priorities of the Chief Justice's Commission was an evaluation of North Carolina's post-conviction review of innocence claims. Although the reasons for the original conviction of North Carolina's exonerated vary, each exoneration can be characterized as delayed, lengthy, costly, and damaging to the public's confidence in its justice system. In addition, judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys on the Chief Justice's Commission expressed concern regarding the volume of post-conviction motions, the difficulty in identifying credible claims of innocence, and the procedural and political challenges involved with resolution of claims.

After a year and a half of study and review of post-conviction processes both within and outside of the United States, the Chief Justice's Commission drafted and presented to the North Carolina General Assembly a bill establishing the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission. Signed into law in August 2006, the Innocence Inquiry Commission is charged with providing an independent and balanced truth-seeking forum for credible claims of innocence in North Carolina. The Commission is a diverse group with representation from the judiciary, law enforcement, the defense bar, prosecutors, victim's advocates, and the public.

Article 1

Applicability of the Statute

- (A) **The Statute.** The Statute designated by the North Carolina General Statutes (N.C. G.S.) as Article 92 § 15A-1460-1475 (the Statute) creates the Commission and sets forth the duties of the Commission and the Commission staff.
- (B) **Definitions.** The definitions cited in the Statute shall apply to all terms set forth in these Rules.
- (C) **Statute Prevails.** The rules set forth in this document shall never conflict with the Statute. In the event that a conflict appears, the Statute shall prevail. Any conflict shall be brought to the attention of the Commission and modified to bring the Rules into compliance with the Statute.

¹ This Commission was originally named the North Carolina Actual Innocence Commission.

Article 2

Criteria for Review of an Innocence Claim

- (A) **Criteria.** The following criteria shall be met before an innocence claim may move into the formal inquiry phase. Any criteria that require some level of discretion shall be referred directly to the Executive Director or her/his designee.
1. Conviction must have been in North Carolina state court. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 2. Conviction must be for a felony. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 3. Applicant must be a living person. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 4. Applicant must be claiming complete factual innocence for any criminal responsibility for the crime. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 5. Credible evidence of innocence must exist. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 6. Verifiable evidence of innocence must exist. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 7. Claim must not have been previously heard at trial or in a post-conviction hearing. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 8. Applicant must sign agreement pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467.
- (B) **Guilty Plea Cases.** In order for a claim that arose from a guilty plea to be considered by the Commission, there must be credible, verifiable evidence of innocence that was not reasonably available to the convicted person at the time that he/she pleaded guilty or scientific testing that was not completed.
- (C) **Other Types of Pleas.** All Rules relating to guilty pleas will also apply to pleas entered pursuant to North Carolina v. Alford, 400 U.S. 25 (1970), or pleas of no contest and *nolo contendere*.
- (D) **Rejection of a Claim.** If at any point prior to hearing, the case is determined to no longer meet the criteria, the claim shall be rejected. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(a).

Article 3

Initiation of an Innocence Claim

- (A) **Contact Information.**
1. The Commission staff shall keep North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services informed of the Commission's current contact information.
 2. The Commission staff shall create and maintain a webpage with information on how to initiate an innocence claim and a statement of the Commission's mission.
- (B) **Initiation of a Claim.** An innocence claim may be initiated in any reasonable manner from any person or party.
- (C) **Forwarded Claims.** If a claim is made to a different governmental body, it may forward the claim to the Commission.
- (D) **Referral from another Organization.** Another organization may refer a case it has been reviewing to the Commission by written referral. The case will only be reviewed by the Commission if the referring organization allows full and complete access to their entire file on the case.
- (E) **Judge, Victim, Law Enforcement, Correction Official, and Prosecutorial Initiation.** Any innocence claim initiated by a judge, victim, current or former

law enforcement officer, correction official, or prosecutor shall be removed from the typical review process and forwarded directly to the Executive Director and he/she shall personally decide how to proceed on the case.

- (F) **Guilty Pleas.** In cases where the convicted person pleaded guilty, the case shall be rejected before November, 2008 and referred to the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence.

Article 4 Innocence Claim Review

- (A) **Tracking of Claims.** The Executive Director or his/her designee shall create and maintain a tracking system that will, at a minimum, record the name of the convicted person and the ultimate outcome of their claim. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1465(a).
- (B) **Filing System.** The Executive Director or his/her designee shall create and maintain a filing system for the innocence claim physical files pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1465(a). When a file is moved for investigation or review purposes, the tracking system shall track the location of the physical file.
1. **Maintaining Files.** Complete files will be maintained for a minimum of three years after the claim is rejected. After three years, a basic claim summary shall be maintained that includes the name of the convicted person, the date of application, the persons involved in the review, and the reason for rejection.
- (C) **Review of a Claim.** The Executive Director or his/her designee shall create a procedure for reviewing and gathering information on an innocence claim. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1465(a).
- (D) **Rejection of a Claim.** If at any point during the review of an innocence claim, the case is determined to not meet the criteria set out in Article 2, the claim shall be rejected. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(a).
- (E) **Students.** The Commission staff may utilize student resources for all levels of case work. In no case, will decision-making authority rest with students.
- (F) **Decision-Making Authority.** The Executive Director or his/her designee will have authority to make the decision whether to reject a case, call for further review, or move a case into formal inquiry.
- (G) **Transition to Formal Inquiry Phase.** After a thorough review has been completed and the innocence claim meets the criteria set out in Article 2, the case may move into the formal inquiry phase. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(a)
- (H) **Reapplication.** If an innocence claim is initiated based on a case that has already been rejected by the Commission, there must be new evidence of innocence to consider.

Article 5 Formal Inquiry of an Innocence Claim

- (A) **Counsel.** The convicted person has the right to representation before signing the agreement waiver and throughout any formal inquiry process. The convicted person may retain counsel, apply for court appointed counsel, or represent himself/herself by signing a waiver. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(b).
1. **Court Appointed Counsel.** If the convicted person chooses to apply for court appointed counsel, the Commission Chair shall determine indigency status and Indigent Defense Services shall assign counsel if necessary. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(b).
- (B) **Signed Agreement.** The convicted person shall sign an agreement waiving his/her procedural safeguards and privileges, agreeing to cooperate with the Commission, and agreeing to provide full disclosure regarding all inquiry requirements to the Commission. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(b).
1. **Right to Counsel.** If the convicted person elected to retain or was assigned court appointed counsel, the convicted person's counsel shall be present at the signing of the agreement. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(b).
 2. **Procedure for Signing the Agreement.** The convicted person's signature shall be verified by counsel or in the event that the convicted person is representing himself/herself, the signature shall be notarized. The original copy of the agreement shall be delivered to the Commission staff.
 3. **Attorney-Client Privilege.** The waiver of procedural safeguards and privileges applies to attorney-client privilege for all matters relating to the convicted person's innocence claim, including the attorney retained or appointed as a part of N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(b) or 1469. This does not create an affirmative duty on the part of the attorney to disclose.
 4. **Refusal to Cooperate.** If the convicted person refuses to comply with the terms of the agreement or is uncooperative with the Commission staff in any way, the inquiry will be discontinued pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(g).
- (C) **Victim Notification.** The Commission staff shall use due diligence to notify any victims of the underlying crime about the formal inquiry and explain the inquiry process. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(c). If any victim is no longer living, efforts shall be made to notify the victim's next of kin. The victim's family will designate one member as the contact person for all victim notifications and rights.
1. **Victim's Rights.** The Commission staff shall inform the victim of his/her right to present his/her views throughout the formal inquiry. The Commission staff shall assist the victim or the victim's family to understand the Commission's procedures and the victim's rights. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(c).
- (D) **Priority.** The Commission staff will give priority to investigation of cases where the convicted person is currently incarcerated solely for the crime in which he or she claims factual innocence. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1466(2).

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- (E) **Investigation Procedures.** The Executive Director and staff shall create an investigation procedure unique to each case and keep detailed records throughout the investigation.
- (F) **Investigation Updates.** Regular reports of investigation will be made to the Executive Director, and he/she will coordinate investigations. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1465.
- (G) **Investigative Power.** The Commission staff may employ the Rules of Civil Procedure set out in N.C. G.S. § 1A-1 to obtain information and may use any measure set forth in N.C. G.S. § 15A. “The Commission may issue process to compel the attendance of witnesses and production of evidence, administer oaths, petition the Superior Court of Wake County or of the original jurisdiction for enforcement of process or for other relief, and prescribe its own rules of procedure.” N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(d).
- (H) **Discovery and Disclosure.** All North Carolina discovery and disclosure statutes apply retroactively to any case under formal inquiry by the Commission staff. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(f).
- (I) **Challenges to Authority.** In the event that there are challenges to the authority of the Commission staff or the Commission’s access to evidence, the Chairman of the Commission will conduct such inquiries as may be necessary. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(d).
- (J) **Service of Process.** The Commission’s Director or his/her designee has the authority to serve subpoenas or other process issued by the Commission. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(e).
- (K) **Formal Requests.** Formal requests for evidence shall be approved by the Commission Chair. Formal request include, but are not limited to, subpoenas, court orders, and requests for DNA testing.
- (L) **Rejection.** If at any point prior to hearing, it is determined that the case no longer meets the criteria set out in Article 3, it will be rejected. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467(a). Rejection prior to hearing may only be done by with the consent of the Executive Director.

Article 6

Presentation to the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

- (A) **Hearing Requirements.** A hearing before the Commission shall include all eight members of the Commission including the Commission Chair. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468.
- (B) **Commissioner Recuses.** A Commissioner shall recuse himself/herself if he/she had any involvement in the case during the original trial or any post-conviction motions. A Commissioner shall recuse himself/herself if some event has caused him/her to become biased about a case and unable to participate in the hearing in a fair and impartial manner.
 - 1. **Formal Recusal.** At the beginning of the hearing, the Commission Chair shall make a formal inquiry as to whether any Commissioner needs to recuse himself/herself.

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2. **Prior Information.** It is contemplated that information about cases may be made known to Commissioners before the hearing without requiring them to recuse themselves.
 3. **Independent Investigation.** In no event will a Commissioner conduct his/her own independent investigation or review of a case.
- (C) **Alternate Commissioners.** In the event that a Commissioner is unable to attend a hearing or has recused himself/herself, the Commissioner's Alternate shall fulfill the duties of the Commissioner. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1463(b). If an Alternate Commissioner is not fulfilling full Commission duties, he/she may attend hearings of the Commission, but may not participate in discussion and may not vote.
- (D) **Open and Closed Proceedings.** The functions of the Commission are exempt from public meetings laws and the hearing before the Commission will be presumed to be closed. The Commission Chair, in his/her sole discretion, may open part or all of a hearing. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(a).
- (E) **Victim Notification.** The Executive Director or his/her designee will use all due diligence to notify the victim or the victim's next of kin at least 30 days prior to the presentation to the full Commission pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(b).
1. **Closed Proceedings.** The victim or next of kin are permitted to attend closed proceedings, other than Commission deliberations, if they give 10 days notice to the Commission pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(b). The Commission Chair, in its discretion, may permit a victim to be accompanied to a closed hearing by a family member or other support person. If the Commission determines that the victim's presence may interfere with the any proceedings, the Commission may close any portion of the proceedings to the victim. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(b).
 2. **Notification of Result.** The Executive Director or his/her designee will use all due diligence to immediately notify the victim or the victim's next of kin of the Commission's decision. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
- (F) **Recording.** A proceeding before the Commission shall be recorded and transcribed. All votes of the Commission members shall be a part of the record. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(e).
1. **Confidential Records.** All records of the Commission proceedings are confidential and exempt from public record and meeting laws, except as described in section 2 below. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(e).
 2. **Judicial Review.** If the Commission votes for judicial review, the records that support that conclusion shall become public at the time of referral to the Superior Court of original jurisdiction. This public disclosure shall include all files and materials considered by the Commission and a full transcript of the hearing before the Commission. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(e).
 3. **No Further Review.** If the Commission votes against judicial review, the records shall remain confidential. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(e).
- (G) **Presentation.** The Executive Director or his/her designee shall make a presentation of all relevant evidence to the Commission. Relevant evidence will include information on evidence originally presented to a jury or used for plea

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bargaining, evidence presented at any post-conviction hearings, and any evidence supporting the convicted person's claim of complete factual innocence.

1. **Hearing of Evidence.** All evidence will be presented simultaneously to each Commissioner. In no event will a Commissioner hear evidence apart from the other members of the Commission. This does not include Commission staff seeking approval from the Commission Chair for work on a case.
 2. **Evidence.** The presentation may include evidence not limited to, affidavits, testimony of witnesses, presentation of physical evidence, expert testimony, laboratory reports, medical evidence, documents, recorded evidence, or electronic evidence.
 - a. **Testimony.** In the event that testimony is provided as a part of the presentation, the Commission Chair will administer the oath to the witness. The Executive Director of the Commission or his/her designee will examine the witness, but any member of the Commission may ask additional questions of the witness.
 3. **Written Report.** The Executive Director and/or his/her designee shall provide the members of the Commission with a written report of the relevant evidence in the case prior to the presentation.
- (H) **Vote.** After hearing the evidence, the Commission members will vote on whether there is sufficient evidence of factual innocence to merit judicial review. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
1. **Closed Deliberation.** The Commission's deliberation and vote shall be closed.
 2. **The Standard of Review.** The standard for voting shall be "sufficient evidence of factual innocence to merit judicial review." N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468.
 3. **Five Votes Required.** If the case did not arise from a guilty plea, at least five members shall vote for judicial review in order for the case to be referred to the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
 4. **Eight Votes Required.** If the case arose from a guilty plea, all eight members shall vote for judicial review in order for the case to move on. Cases that arose from a guilty plea will not be considered by the Commission before November, 2008. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
 5. **All Members Vote.** "All eight voting members of the Commission shall participate in the final vote." N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
- (I) **Continuation of the Hearing.** The Commission may vote to continue the hearing and request additional information when they resume.
- (J) **Further Judicial Review.** In the event that the Commission votes for further judicial review, the opinion will be documented and the opinion and findings of fact will be filed with the Clerk of Court of original jurisdiction and a copy provided to the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
- (K) **No Review.** In the event that the Commission does not vote for further judicial review, the opinion will be documented and filed in the office of the Clerk of

- Superior Court in the district in which the case arose, with copies to the District Attorney and Senior Resident Superior Court Judge. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c)
- (L) **Findings of Fact.** At the close of the voting, the Commission Chair will make specific findings of fact regarding the case. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).
- (M) **Service on Prosecution.** A copy of the opinion, findings of fact, and record will be served on the District Attorney in the original jurisdiction. If the case was a capital cases, service will on both the District Attorney and the Attorney General. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(c).

Article 7

Post-Commission Three Judge Panel

- (A) **Referral.** If the Commission votes that there is sufficient evidence of factual innocence to merit judicial review, the Chair of the Commission will ask the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court to commission a three-judge panel to hear evidence relevant to the Commission's recommendation. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469.
1. **Previous Involvement in the Case.** The panel shall not include any judge who had substantial previous involvement in the case. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469. Previous involvement includes involvement in pre-trial motions, at trial, or in a post-conviction MAR.
- (B) **Setting the Hearing.** The senior resident superior court judge in the original jurisdiction of the case shall enter an order setting the hearing for a special session of superior court. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(a).
2. **Response from the State.** The State will be required to file a response to the Commission's opinion within 60 days of the order setting the hearing. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(b).
- (C) **Victim Notification.** The Clerk of Court shall notify the victim or victim's next of kin by writing at least 30 days prior to the hearing. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(f).
- (D) **Counsel.** The convicted person may elect to retain his/her own counsel, represent himself/herself, or waive the right to counsel. If the convicted person chooses to apply for court appointed counsel, the senior judge on the panel shall determine the convicted person's indigency status and Indigent Defense Services shall assign counsel if necessary. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(e).
1. **Relief of Costs.** The senior judge on the panel may enter an order relieving the convicted person of any portion of the costs of proceedings. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(e).
- (E) **The State.** The District Attorney or his designee of the original conviction shall represent the State. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(c).
- (F) **Role of the Commission Staff.** The Executive Director shall be present at this hearing and available to the panel of Judges as needed including a presentation of a case summary.
- (G) **Right to be Present.** The Convicted Person has a right to be present at the hearing and have counsel present. If the convicted person chooses to waive his/her right to be present, the waiver shall be done in writing. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(d).

- (H) **The Hearing.** The hearing shall be an evidentiary hearing conducted by the three judge panel. The Judges may compel the testimony of any witnesses, including the convicted person. The Judges may also continue the hearing, if necessary, to secure additional information. The convicted person may not assert any privileges or prevent any witnesses from testifying. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(d).
- (I) **Conference.** The senior judge on the panel may allow the attorneys for the parties to appear before him for a conference on any matter in the case. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(g).
- (J) **Judicial Standard.** The three judge panel will hear the evidence and determine if there is clear and convincing evidence of the convicted person's innocence. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(h).
- (K) **Vote.** The vote of the three judge panel shall be unanimous. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(h).
 - 1. **Relief Granted.** If the vote of the panel is unanimous that clear and convincing evidence exists of the person's innocence, the panel shall enter a dismissal of all charges. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(h).
 - 2. **Relief Denied.** If the vote of the panel is not unanimous that clear and convincing evidence exists of the person's innocence, the panel shall deny relief. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1469(h).
- (L) **Finality of Decision.** The decision of the panel of three judges is final and no appeal is available. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1470(a).

Article 8 Other Proceedings

- (A) **Effect on Other Post-Conviction Motions.** The process has no effect on other post-conviction motions. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1470(b).
- (B) **Referral to Other Agency.** If the Executive Director, one or more members of the Commission, or one or more members of the three judge panel determine that a remedy other than that provided for by N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460-1475 may be appropriate; they shall notify the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence, North Carolina Indigent Defense Services, or any other appropriate agency, in writing so that they may pursue any appropriate action.
 - 1. **Return to Referring Agency.** If the case was referred from another agency, the case shall be returned to that agency so that they may pursue any appropriate action.

Article 9 Disclosure

- (A) **Evidence of Guilt.** Evidence uncovered by the Commission's staff that supports the convicted person's guilt will be made available to the district attorney if it was not available to the district attorney at the time of conviction.
 - 1. **Evidence of Other Crimes.** Evidence uncovered by the Commission's staff that tends to show the convicted person may have committed other

unrelated felonies will be made available to the district attorney who would have jurisdiction over those felonies.

2. **Evidence of Greater Crimes.** Evidence uncovered by the Commission's staff that tends to show the convicted person may be guilty of a higher level crime than the one for which he/she was charged or convicted shall be made available to the district attorney who would have jurisdiction over the higher level crime.
 3. **Evidence of Other Person's Involvement.** Evidence uncovered by the Commission's staff that tends to show that other people may have been involved in the commission of the crime will be made available to the district attorney who would have jurisdiction over that crime.
- (B) **Evidence Favorable to the Convicted Person.** Evidence uncovered by the Commission's staff that is favorable to the convicted person shall be disclosed to the convicted person and the convicted person's counsel. This evidence includes, but is not limited to evidence of innocence. The disclosure shall occur regardless of the outcome of the hearings. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(d).
- (C) **Evidence of Wrongdoing.** Evidence of criminal acts, professional misconduct, or other wrongdoings uncovered made as a finding by the Commission shall be referred to the proper authority. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1468(d).

Article 10

Other Duties of the Commission

- (A) **Report to Legislature.** Beginning on January 1, 2008 the Commission will give an annual report to the legislature and recommend any funding and legislative changes. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1475.
- (B) **Website.** The Commission staff will maintain a website with access to information on how an innocence claim may be submitted and information on the Commission.
- (C) **Additional Funds.** The Executive Director or his/her designee will apply for and accept any funds that may become available to further the work of the Commission. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1466.
- (D) **Media Inquiries.** The Commission staff shall not respond to media inquiries. The Executive Director or his/her designee may respond to media inquiries about the Commission, but should not discuss the details of specific cases.

Appendix A

Footnoted List of Criteria for Review of an Innocence Claim

“The Commission may informally screen and dismiss a case summarily at its discretion.”
N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467

- (A) **Criteria.** The following criteria shall be met before an innocence claim may move into the formal inquiry phase. Any criteria that require some level of discretion shall be referred directly to the Executive Director or her/his designee.
1. Conviction must have been in North Carolina state court. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 2. Conviction must be for a felony. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 3. Applicant must be a living person. N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 4. Applicant must be claiming complete factual innocence for any criminal responsibility for the crime.^{1,2} N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 5. Credible evidence of innocence must exist.³ N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 6. Verifiable evidence of innocence must exist.⁴ N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 7. Claim must not have been previously heard at trial or in a post-conviction hearing.⁵ N.C. G.S. § 15A-1460(1).
 8. Applicant must sign agreement pursuant to N.C. G.S. § 15A-1467.
- (B) **Guilty Plea Cases.** In order for a claim that arose from a guilty plea to be considered by the Commission, there must be credible, verifiable evidence of innocence that was not reasonably available to the convicted person at the time that he/she pleaded guilty or scientific testing that was not completed.⁶

¹ Claims of secondary involvement are not considered claims of complete factual innocence.

² Claims of reduced level of culpability or not considered claims of complete factual innocence. As an example, a person convicted of Possession with Intent to Manufacture Sell or Deliver a Controlled Substance is not claiming complete factual innocence if they claim that they possessed the controlled substance only for personal use.

³ Credible evidence may include recantation of a witness, only if it is deemed reliable.

⁴ Evidence that has been completely destroyed will likely not be verifiable.

⁵ Any evidence previously heard by a jury will not be considered. Any ruled upon by a Judge at a post-conviction hearing will not be considered. A denial of a Motion for Appropriate Relief without a hearing will not be considered as evidence heard by a Judge.

⁶ Evidence that would be considered not to have been reasonably available to the convicted person includes, but is not limited to, a witness who could not be located or refused to testify, scientific testing that was not completed, or newly discovered evidence.

Case Progression through Commission Process

