

Proskauer Hosts Presentation on Wrongful Convictions

Proskauer For Good on July 14, 2023

As part of its mission to raise awareness about the impact and importance of [The Legal Aid Society](#), Proskauer's Associates' Campaign for Legal Aid organized a special event on wrongful convictions featuring Elizabeth Felber from Legal Aid's Wrongful Conviction Unit, Jason Flom, a renowned criminal justice reform advocate, and Jimmy Dennis, an exoneree who served 25 years on death row for a crime he did not commit.

With over 2,000 staff members handling over 183,000 individual legal matters per year, Legal Aid has represented vulnerable New Yorkers for over 145 years. Ms. Felber, Director of Legal Aid's Wrongful Conviction Unit, outlined the root causes of wrongful convictions, which include, among other things, misconduct by law enforcement officers and prosecutors, mistaken identification, false confessions, junk science, withheld *Brady* information, ineffective assistance of counsel, and perjured testimony. She further explained how various forms of bias, particularly racial bias, but many others, including sexual orientation and gender bias, play a critical role in wrongful convictions. She illustrated how serious an issue this is, citing the National Registry of Exonerations which tracks wrongful convictions across the country. To date there have been 3,328 exonerations since 1989, with over 29,500+ years lost impacting the physical, mental, and social well-being of innocent individuals as well as their families. Ms. Felber encouraged pro bono participation, outlining remedies available under New York law.

As founding board member of [The Innocence Project](#) and a leading voice on the subject, Jason Flom, who is also an American music industry executive, spoke about his advocacy efforts including his hit podcast [Wrongful Conviction](#), which features compelling stories of men and women who spent decades in prison, some even sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit. The podcast showcases serious challenges facing our criminal justice system but also reveals the great potential for reform when people step up and demand change.

The event culminated with Jimmy Dennis, who described how a young man with a promising music career and no criminal record ended up on death row for 25 years. He fell prey to what the Court described when [vacating his conviction](#) as “improper police work,” prosecutors “withholding exculpatory evidence,” and “significant flaws with defense counsel’s investigation and trial preparation.” At no point during his time on death row did Mr. Dennis give up, demonstrating remarkable strength and determination as he and his pro bono lawyers fought tirelessly for his release. Mr. Dennis also described the significant challenges that recently incarcerated individuals face when reentering society and the great need for additional resources.

This event underscored the importance of pro bono work generally and Proskauer’s longstanding commitment to Legal Aid and the Innocence Project in particular.

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- **Jeremiah K. Evans**

Associate