

## INFORMATION SHEET

### **What is the Midwest Innocence Project?**

The Midwest Innocence Project (MIP) is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the investigation, litigation, and exoneration of wrongfully convicted men and women in Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska. Founded in 2001 through the UMKC School of Law, MIP seeks to exonerate the innocent, educate students, and reform the criminal justice system by identifying and remedying the causes of wrongful convictions. Since that time, the MIP has grown to include programs with other law schools and paralegal schools. Together, MIP attorneys, local attorneys, law school professors, and law students work to review cases, investigate, and litigate claims on innocence.

### **What is the Innocence Project of Iowa?**

The Innocence Project of Iowa (IPI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing legal defense to indigent persons and was founded in 2007 by a group of attorneys, professors, and students committed to the prevention of wrongful convictions and the exoneration of innocent persons.

### **What is the Wrongful Conviction Division?**

The Wrongful Conviction Division of the Special Defense Unit in the Office of the State Public Defender (WCD) is dedicated to the release of indigent Iowa inmates who are innocent of the crimes for which they were convicted. The Wrongful Conviction Division is focused on post-conviction litigation for inmates claiming factual innocence.

### **How do these three organizations work together?**

Recognizing their shared interest in exonerating Iowa residents who have been convicted of crimes they did not commit, the organizations above have chosen to enter into a collaborative agreement to further promote justice and secure exonerations within Iowa.

### **What is the cost to me?**

We provide our services to applicants free of charge. Statutorily, the court may order you to pay attorney fees. As a matter of policy, we will always seek to waive any court-ordered fee payment for all legal proceedings we initiate on behalf of your innocence claim.

### **What types of cases do these organizations accept?**

They review cases where the applicant claims to be actually innocent of the crime(s) for which he or she is convicted. In order to challenge a conviction, there must be substantial new evidence to support a claim of innocence. This newly discovered evidence could be physical evidence that was not previously subjected to forensic examination, such as DNA testing. Newly discovered evidence may also include non-physical evidence, such as from an eyewitness who was previously unknown or a recantation from a victim, if such a recantation is supported by other new evidence. We will investigate cases where there is a substantial chance new evidence can be discovered.

### **What types of cases will the organizations NOT accept?**

We are unable to represent all applicants who apply to our project; we are only able to become involved in a select number of cases.

We **cannot** help if any of the following are true:

- You are currently awaiting trial or are still pursuing your direct appeal.
- You are currently represented by an attorney.
- You are not claiming actual innocence to the case for which you seek assistance.
- You have seven years or less left to serve on the incarceration portion of your sentence.
- You played a minor role in the crime.
- You feel you should have been convicted of a different crime.
- You acted in self-defense.
- You claim the defense of insanity or intoxication.
- You were convicted of sexual assault for an encounter that you say was consensual.
- There is no newly discovered evidence.

**Can any of these organizations help me with other types of cases?**

No. Due to the large number of requests that we receive and our limited resources, we are only able to assist in cases where the applicant is claiming actual innocence. If we cannot help you because you are not claiming actual innocence, but your constitutional rights were violated, or you were otherwise treated unlawfully or wrongfully, you may still be able to file an application for postconviction relief under Iowa Code Chapter 822. You may file your application with the appropriate clerk of district court and request a court appointed attorney to represent you, or otherwise seek relief under any other applicable state or federal law, if you timely file for relief.

**How do I apply?**

You may apply by filling out an "Application for Assistance." You may request a copy of the application by writing to the following address: Midwest Innocence Project, 605 West 47<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 222, Kansas City, MO 64112.

**What should I expect if I apply?**Application for Assistance

The process begins with our Application for Assistance. All inmates seeking assistance must fill-out an application. Our application is twelve pages long and asks many questions about your conviction. We ask that all applicants complete the application to the best of his or her ability. It is important for us to have the answers to as many of the questions as possible. Completed applications should be returned to the MIP office at 605 West 47<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 222, Kansas City, MO 64112.

Intake Review and Screening Process

Once your application is returned, it will be reviewed by our Intake Staff. Our Intake Staff reviews each application to determine if it meets certain basic program criteria. (See the explanation of cases the organizations accept and does not accept above.) After our Intake Staff makes their initial determination, we will write to you and inform you of our decision. Because of the large number of requests that we receive, it may take up to six months or more for our Intake Staff to review your request.

If our Intake Staff needs more information to assess your application, it will be placed into our screening review process. In this process, intake staff or law students may contact you and other investigating or state agencies to collect documents related to your case. Such documents may include transcripts, lab reports, police reports, etc. Please do not send documents unless requested by us.

Wait List

If our Intake Staff decides that your case warrants further review, we will place your case on our wait list. Please know that if your case is placed on the wait list, we do not agree to do anything other than review your case for potential meritorious claims of actual innocence. If after the intake and/or screening process you have upcoming court dates or deadlines, we are unable to assist you with these matters while your case is on our wait list.

Eventually, the cases on our wait list will be assigned to attorneys or law students, working under the supervision of a project attorney, for a more in-depth review. When your case is assigned to law students, they will contact you and specify what activities we agree and do not agree to perform on your behalf. Due to high demand, cases stay on our wait list for as long as three years or more before we are able to assign them for further review.

**How can I contact you?**

While we prefer to respond to requests and questions from inmates via mail, we do accept collect calls from inmates as well as emails. We will speak with any person to whom you have given us permission in writing. Our address is 605 West 47<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 222, Kansas City, MO 64112.

**Where can I find more information?**

More information about each organization may be found on the internet at: <http://www.themip.org>, [www.spd.iowa.gov](http://www.spd.iowa.gov), or <http://www.iowainnocence.org/>