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Kennedy announces plan for “bold reform” in Lake County State’s Attorney’s Office

National press highlights ongoing concerns over wrongful convictions

Libertyville, IL – Earlier this week, Chris Kennedy filed nomination papers as an official candidate for Lake County State’s Attorney, calling for a “new direction” and releasing a detailed plan to establish a Conviction Integrity Unit that will address ongoing concerns over alleged wrongful convictions in Lake County. The issue was raised once again in a lengthy *New York Times Magazine* article about the Lake County State’s Attorney’s Office, “[The Prosecution’s Case Against DNA](#).” The article highlighted “what defense lawyers and law professors suspect is an alarming number of wrongful convictions” in Lake County. As the *Times* noted, “One murder case has unraveled, and several other rape and murder convictions are now being challenged.”

The *Chicago Sun-Times* then printed a scathing editorial yesterday, “[The evidence is in: These DNA ideas are just stupid](#),” lambasting “outlandish notions about genetic evidence.” The Sun-Times added, “In a county where prosecutors and judges are almost all from the same political party and tend to view the world through the same lens, this may seem to make sense. But conservative, law-and-order citizens shouldn’t buy it. Using doubtful evidence to keep people in prison undermines the argument for stiff penalties in serious crime.”

“This has to stop,” Kennedy said. Kennedy, a former prosecutor, has for [months](#) called for reform in the State’s Attorney’s Office “to prevent costly lawsuits and to stop further crime by making sure we pursue and convict the actual perpetrators of violent crimes.” Kennedy emphasized that the County and its many dedicated law enforcement professionals deserve new leadership in the State’s Attorney’s Office.

One of Kennedy's first priorities as State's Attorney will be the establishment of a Conviction Integrity Unit that will examine cases in which DNA evidence does not match a defendant, among other duties. (See attached summary). The specialized unit, Kennedy said, will consist of a senior prosecutor without ties to the original convictions, a senior investigator and an independent advisory board. Kennedy's Conviction Integrity Unit "will have authority to independently investigate and make recommendations on challenged convictions, prosecute cold cases where the evidence suggests different or additional perpetrators, improve training, and oversee ongoing cases and investigations to ensure that evidence is properly collected, tested and evaluated at the earliest opportunity in every case," Kennedy said.

The Lake County State's Attorney's Office is "now national news for all the wrong reasons," Kennedy said, adding that "a prosecutor's duty is to do justice, not merely seek convictions," citing [Illinois Rule of Professional Conduct 3.8](#). "Being tough on crime means being smart on crime," Kennedy said. "We can't afford to get these cases wrong; the consequences are too severe, especially the potential harm to public safety."

In one Lake County case discussed in the *New York Times Magazine* article, Jerry Hobbs was freed after being held for 5 years for the murder of his young daughter and another child. During that time, Jorge Torrez, who matched the DNA evidence on one of the victims, committed at least one rape, for which he was later convicted, and an alleged murder of a young woman in Virginia. Hobbs has filed a lawsuit; Lake County has yet to prosecute Torrez.

The price of wrongful convictions is extremely high, costing Illinois taxpayers over \$214 million, according to a 2011 [investigation](#) by the Better Government Association. Examining 85 cases of wrongful convictions in Illinois since 1976, the report found that innocent people had been incarcerated for more than 926 years. Even worse, the actual perpetrators of those crimes were free to commit hundreds of other crimes, including 14 murders and at least 83 other felonies. "Failure of the criminal justice system of this magnitude is intolerable," Kennedy said, vowing to take bold action to improve the integrity and effectiveness of prosecutions in Lake County if elected State's Attorney next November.

Chris Kennedy has a proven record of reform and leadership, having led passage of numerous laws to protect individuals with autism and other disabilities, and gaining broad trial experience handling many difficult, high-stakes cases throughout his 17-year legal career. Kennedy is an independent leader who will make real and positive changes as Lake County State's Attorney. He has broad support in Lake County's communities and a strong record as a tough but fair prosecutor and longtime advocate for victims, children, and families. In addition, Kennedy is a member of Libertyville District 70 School Board and the Illinois Autism Task Force. He lives in Libertyville with his wife Lisa and their three children.

For more information, go to www.chriskennedy2012.com.