

Great North Innocence Project client's convictions vacated after 16 years of wrongful incarceration

Edgar Barrientos-Quintana was wrongfully convicted of murder and attempted murder in the tragic death of teenager Jesse Mickelson

(Minneapolis, MN) – Today, the Great North Innocence Project (GNIP) announced that its client Edgar Barrientos-Quintana's convictions have been vacated. Mr. Barrientos-Quintana was convicted of murder and attempted murder in Hennepin County and sentenced to life without parole in May 2009. In his decision, Judge John McBride found that defense counsel's flawed representation and the prosecutors' *Brady* violations undermine confidence in the jury's guilty verdict.

Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's attorney from the Great North Innocence Project, Anna McGinn, said about the exoneration, "We are thrilled with today's outcome and that justice has finally prevailed for Edgar. The tragedy of Mr. Mickelson's murder was compounded by Edgar's wrongful conviction and incarceration. We are all looking forward to seeing the impact he will inevitably make outside of the prison walls."

Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's family shared, "As a family, we express our gratitude to God for granting Edgar's freedom. He has missed out on so many precious moments, including watching his children grow up, attending graduations, birthdays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas celebrations with the family, and the loss of our beloved dad. He has a lot of ground to cover. Finally, my mom will be able to have her son back at the family dinners, and the place that has been vacant for so long will be filled with his laughter and presence once again. Edgar's journey has been one of resilience, strength, and unwavering faith. Despite the challenges and obstacles that he has faced, he has never lost hope. His spirit is an inspiration to us all, a testament to the power of perseverance and the human capacity for endurance."

The Great North Innocence Project has been investigating Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's conviction for nearly 11 years and represented Mr. Barrientos-Quintana in his application to the Minnesota Conviction Review Unit (CRU), a division of the Minnesota Attorney General's Office.

Former GNIP Legal Director and current Assistant Professor at University of St. Thomas School of Law Julie Jonas said, "This is a victory for Edgar and for justice. After working with him for over a decade, we have finally proven what we've always known to be true - he is innocent. This day is a powerful reminder that the pursuit of truth and justice may be long, but it is always worth the fight."

In July 2024, the CRU released the findings of its own two-year investigation into Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's conviction. The CRU found that evidence in Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's case "convincingly establishes Barrientos' innocence and that he was convicted of a crime that he did not commit."

The Great North Innocence Project and CRU investigations found that Mr. Barrientos-Quintana had a credible alibi for the time of the shooting and that investigators used highly problematic eyewitness identification procedures that went against established best practices. The tactics were similar to those used in the case of [Marvin Haynes](#), the Great North Innocence Project client who was exonerated in December 2023.

Additionally, according to the CRU report, investigators "contaminated witnesses' memories on the shooter's hair length through leading questions." Investigators failed to utilize a double-blind procedure when administering lineups, despite it being Hennepin County policy at the time, and investigators used interrogation tactics that were suggestive, threatening, and coercive to juvenile witnesses.

In his order vacating Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's convictions, Judge McBride found that the state either failed to

provide, or did not provide in a timely fashion, exculpatory evidence to Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's attorney before his trial as required by the United States and Minnesota Constitutions.

Judge McBride also determined that Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's defense counsel was ineffective on numerous fronts, including failing to present exculpatory evidence and failing to challenge the investigators' and eyewitnesses' testimony during trial. In sum, the jury did not receive all of the information related to witness descriptions of the shooter, the various impossible stories told by the juvenile so-called accomplice, or Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's credible alibi.

In September 2024, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office (HCAO) filed a petition in support of post-conviction relief for Mr. Barrientos-Quintana based on his actual innocence stating that the office "can no longer stand behind the integrity of the convictions that resulted from the trial."

About the collective effort it took to free Mr. Barrientos-Quintana, Ms. Jonas said, "I am grateful for the hard work of the Conviction Review Unit at the Attorney General's Office and the Hennepin County Attorney's Office. Their commitment to justice, as well as support from numerous law students, pro bono attorneys, and private investigators who believed in Edgar's innocence, made this moment possible."

Mr. Barrientos-Quintana's family added, "We couldn't have achieved this without the unwavering support and trust of the Great North Innocence Project. From the very beginning, they have consistently believed in Edgar's innocence."

About the Great North Innocence Project

The mission of the Great North Innocence Project is to free the wrongfully convicted and prevent future wrongful convictions from occurring in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Great North Innocence Project, a founding member of the Innocence Network, has screened and investigated individuals' credible claims of actual innocence and represented wrongfully convicted people for over 20 years. The Great North Innocence Project also educates attorneys and other criminal legal professionals on best practices and works to reform the criminal legal system to prevent innocent people from going to prison. For more, visit greatnorthinnocenceproject.org.

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