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For Immediate Release

Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office CIU, WMU-Cooley Innocence Project and the Urban Institute Partner on New Grant for Research and Data Collection

The Bureau of Justice Assistance has awarded Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office Conviction Integrity Unit, Western Michigan University Cooley Law School Innocence Project and the Urban Institute a $249,948.00 grant. The 24-month long grant program is entitled “Upholding the Rule of Law and Preventing Wrongful Convictions.”

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said, “This generous grant allows us to partner with the Urban Institute, who have a long track record in research and reform. The data management system they create will be invaluable to understanding wrongful convictions. I believe this project will have a significant impact upon prosecutors, conviction integrity units and innocence projects across the country for years to come.”

Wayne County CIU and Cooley IP staff—in partnership with the Urban Institute—will work to determine gaps in the data currently collected by the WCPO CIU, and to develop a comprehensive new system for data entry and management. These improvements will allow for better case management and provide a platform by which to examine broader trends and contributors to justice system errors. The Urban collaboration will be led by Dr. Jeanette Husseemann and Dr. Kelly Walsh, senior researchers affiliated with Urban’s Justice Policy Center.

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“We are very excited to work with the WCPO Conviction Integrity Unit and Western Michigan University Cooley Law School Innocence Project on this important project. These funds will allow us to develop data collection procedures for potential wrongful conviction cases, and will serve as a model for Convictions Integrity Units across the U.S.” said Dr. Jeanette Hussemann.

The Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office Conviction Integrity Unit became operational in January 2018 and has received over 600 requests for investigation. Of the 600 referrals, 300 involve forensic evidence. [https://www.waynecounty.com/elected/prosecutor/conviction-integrity-unit.aspx](https://www.waynecounty.com/elected/prosecutor/conviction-integrity-unit.aspx)

Valerie Newman, Director of the Conviction Integrity Unit, said, “I am beyond excited about this grant and the long term impact of working with the Urban Institute and Cooley Innocence Project to develop a data model that will drive future collaborative efforts and assist in identifying systemic areas of risk.”

The WMU-Cooley Innocence Project currently has 135 Wayne County cases under review and, with the help of this Bureau of Justice Assistance grant funding, will focus on forensic errors. [https://www.cooley.edu/academics/experiential-learning/innocence-project](https://www.cooley.edu/academics/experiential-learning/innocence-project)

WMU-Cooley Innocence Project Director Marla Mitchell-Cichon is looking forward to the collaboration. “This grant will allow our office to identify cases in which outdated or unreliable forensics played a role in the conviction. In turn, the data collection will help identify needed improvements to the criminal justice system, said Mitchell-Cichon.

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