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**New Investigation Confirms Execution of an Innocent Man**

*Broad Body of Evidence Points to Wrongful Execution of Texan Cameron Todd Willingham*

**(Austin, Texas)** — A new investigative report that will appear in the September 7 issue of the *New Yorker* corroborates that Cameron Todd Willingham - who was executed by the State of Texas on February 17, 2004 - was innocent. Willingham had been convicted of arson in 1991 that killed his young daughters. Every fire expert who has examined this case since the time of conviction has concluded that there was no evidence to support the finding of arson.

According to the Innocence Project, this new report "exhaustively deconstructs every aspect of the case and shows that none of the evidence used to convict Willingham was valid." It goes beyond the forensic science that has been the focus of investigations for the last five years and debunks every other piece of evidence, including the snitch testimony, witness testimony, and circumstantial evidence.

The *New Yorker* piece comes on the heels of a report filed last week with the Texas Forensic Science Commission by fire scientist Craig L. Beyler, who found that the investigators in this case had a "poor understanding of fire science" and that "a finding of arson could not be sustained." The Commission now will examine Beyler's report and issue its own findings with regard to the allegations of forensic misconduct in this case.

"Simply put, there appears to be no doubt that Cameron Todd Willingham would not be convicted if he were put on trial today, much less sentenced to death and executed," said Kristin Houlé, Executive Director of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "This investigation comes at a critical moment in our state's dialogue about the death penalty and contributes to growing concerns about the reliability and fairness of a system that takes human life. Increasingly diverse voices, including those of law enforcement, religious leaders, murder victim family members, and state legislators all have called for an end to this arbitrary and error-prone form of punishment."

The death penalty landscape in Texas – and in the United States as a whole – has changed dramatically in the short five and a half years since Willingham's execution in 2004. Since that time, 21 individuals – including 2 Texans – have been released from death rows nationwide due to evidence of their wrongful conviction (135 people have been released from death rows nationwide since 1973).

This includes Ernest Ray Willis, who was exonerated from death row in Texas on October 6, 2004 and whose case also was addressed by the Beyler report. Willis had been sentenced to death for the 1986 deaths of two women who died in a house fire that was ruled arson. Seventeen years later, Pecos County District Attorney Ori T. White revisited the case after a federal judge overturned Willis' conviction. White hired an arson specialist to review the original evidence, and the specialist concluded that there was no evidence of arson. In 2004, prosecutors dropped all charges against Willis.

“This case lends new urgency to the need for an honest assessment of the intolerable risks associated with the death penalty,” said Sam Millsap, former District Attorney of Bexar County. “I urge all public officials in Texas to scrutinize the case of Cameron Todd Willingham and to recognize that the only responsible way to address the ultimate fallibility of the capital punishment system is to abolish the death penalty altogether. “

The full article in the September 7 issue of the *New Yorker* is available at [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/09/07/090907fa\\_fact\\_grann?printable=true](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/09/07/090907fa_fact_grann?printable=true).

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