



NEWS RELEASE –

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Contact:

Carolyn Tyler, Communications Director
720-913-9025, carolyn.tyler@denverda.org

Denver DA Beth McCann Launches Conviction Review Unit

DENVER—A conviction review unit is an essential part of an effective and modern prosecutorial office. Conviction review units (also called conviction integrity units) are found across the country in dozens of prosecutor offices both big and small. After receiving budget approval from Denver City Council, Denver District Attorney Beth McCann today announced that her office [launched a conviction review unit](#) this month and is accepting applications to review claims of actual innocence. It also will review the increasing number of clemency applications from the Governor’s office and requests for sentence reviews of particularly long sentences that are incompatible with current law as well as standards of fairness and equity.

“If the wrong person is convicted the only person who benefits is the true offender,” said Denver DA McCann. “Our prosecutorial teams put their hearts into ensuring that those who inflict harm on our community are rightfully held accountable for their actions. Nevertheless, it is critically important to ensure that justice is done in those rare instances where someone asserts a legitimate claim of actual innocence or a sentence that is now overly harsh in light of statute changes. It is equally important to ensure that we are always examining our work, learning lessons and constantly improving.”

Deputy District Attorney Victoria Cisneros, a qualified and experienced attorney formerly in the office’s Appellate Division and the office’s representative with the Prosecution Leaders of Now will lead the new Unit. Cisneros will ensure compliance with the proper procedures and monitor any outside reviews and evidence testing and will work with the Denver Police Department’s Crime Laboratory to ensure accuracy. The unit is also comprised of an investigator and interns.

“Prior to going to law school, I worked with the defense community. For this reason, I think I understand the concerns raised in this area,” said Cisneros. “I also realized that the best way to affect change and fight for justice meant becoming a prosecutor. I am honored that DA McCann selected me to head the Conviction Review Unit and thank her for the opportunity.”

The Conviction Review Unit will take every step to ensure reviews are done with sensitivity and discretion. Cisneros and her team will consult with the office’s victim advocates to ensure that communication is appropriately and empathetically handled. Any time a conviction is under



review it has the very real potential of giving false hope to an offender and their supporters and of re-traumatizing victims and their loved ones. For these reasons, these reviews will be undertaken only when there is a legitimate claim of innocence and some specific steps that can be taken to test that assertion. It is critical that confidentiality be preserved until the work is complete.

“Conviction Review Units have a vital role in prosecutor’s offices, ensuring that the prosecutor’s continuing obligation to pursue justice is met even in situations where the appellate courts might provide procedural hurdles,” said John Hollway, Executive Director for the [Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School](#). “The structure of the Denver DA’s new unit, and its collaborations with defense attorneys and responsible innocence organizations is an important gesture of DA McCann’s commitment to accuracy and dedication to justice.”

The District Attorney’s office has been working with the [Korey Wise Innocence project at the University of Colorado Law School](#) to review some cases the Innocence project has brought to our attention. Review of those cases will now be centered in the Conviction Review Unit.

Currently there are:

7 cases being reviewed for possible claims of actual innocence
5 cases under review for possible sentence reductions and
20 cases considered for clemency.