



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bryan Hooper, Sr. exonerated after spending 27 years in prison for a crime he did not commit

The State's key witness recanted her testimony, confessed to the crime

(Minneapolis, MN) – Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty and the Great North Innocence Project (GNIP) announced Thursday that Bryan Hooper, Sr. has been exonerated and is expected to be released from Stillwater Correctional Facility today. In her decision vacating the conviction, Judge Marta Chou found that “Mr. Hooper’s conviction was tainted by false evidence and that without this false testimony, the jury might have reached a different conclusion.” Mr. Hooper has been incarcerated for over 27 years for the 1998 murder of 77-year-old Ann Prazniak.

“Today, the courts have affirmed what Bryan Hooper, his family, his loved ones, and his advocates have always known: Mr. Hooper is an innocent man,” Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said. “It is our duty as prosecutors to hold the correct individuals responsible for their actions, and that duty demands that we acknowledge our mistakes and make things right as quickly as we can. When our Conviction Integrity Unit learned that another person had confessed to the crime for which Mr. Hooper was convicted, they worked tirelessly to clear his name and secure his release.

“We are relieved that Mr. Hooper can finally return home to his family after 27 years, and I want to again apologize to him and his family for our office’s role in that injustice. We wish Mr. Hooper all the best as he begins to navigate a world that is barely recognizable from the world he knew in 1998.”

About the decision, GNIP Legal Director and attorney for Mr. Hooper, Jim Mayer said, “We are grateful that both the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office and now the Court have recognized what Bryan Hooper and his family have maintained for nearly three decades: Bryan Hooper is innocent. We hope the lessons from this case will drive meaningful reforms to prevent future wrongful convictions, and that the Hooper family can finally begin the long process of healing.”

During the course of the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office Conviction Integrity Unit’s (CIU) review of Mr. Hooper’s case, the office learned that the State’s key trial witness had come forward not only to recant her testimony against Mr. Hooper, but to confess to killing Ms. Prazniak and concealing her body.

During the 1998 investigation into Ms. Prazniak’s killing, this individual was questioned by police at least seven times. She only named Mr. Hooper as the perpetrator after several interviews, during which she

was threatened with her own murder charges by police. She has nothing to gain and a great deal to lose by confessing now. The HCAO found that her confession, which she repeated to multiple law enforcement agencies, a prison chaplain, and loved ones, was compelling and consistent.

The remaining evidence used to convict Mr. Hooper of Ms. Prazniak's murder consisted of multiple incentivized witnesses, including what are commonly called "jailhouse informants." In the years since Mr. Hooper's conviction, these individuals have also recanted their statements, with many of those recantations secured through several years of efforts by Mr. Hooper's trial and appellate attorney, Jeffrey Dean.

In light of this new evidence of innocence, HCAO concluded it could not defend Mr. Hooper's conviction.

On August 12, 2025, GNIP filed a petition in Hennepin County District Court on behalf of Mr. Hooper asking that his conviction be vacated and that he be freed. The HCAO joined that request the same day. A hearing was held on September 2, 2025, with Mr. Hooper appearing via Zoom. A day later, Judge Chou issued an order vacating Mr. Hooper's conviction.

About the Great North Innocence Project

The mission of the Great North Innocence Project is to free people convicted of crimes they did not commit and prevent wrongful convictions. 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 24 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.

About the Hennepin County Conviction Integrity Unit

Establishing a CIU was a commitment made by County Attorney Mary Moriarty at the beginning of the administration to address wrongful convictions and build trust with the community. It is the first unit of its kind at the county level in Minnesota.

CIU Data Snapshot

- 173 applications for review since the CIU launched in the fall of 2024
- Completed initial review of 118 cases
- 49 marked for closing
- 55 in queue for full investigation
- 14 in active full investigation (including Bryan Hooper)

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