

Police-Induced False Confessions: Causes, Consequences and Changes that Can Make a Difference

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Bio

Lauren Gottesman, JD is a Senior Staff Attorney in the Innocence Project's Strategic Litigation Department, where she works on issues related to police interrogation and coerced, false confessions. Prior to joining the Innocence Project, Lauren was a public defender at the Legal Aid Society's Manhattan Criminal Defense Practice. During her last year at the Legal Aid Society, Lauren worked in their Decarceration Project, where she provided consultation, training, and direct advocacy regarding pre-trial detention Issues. Before her work at the Legal Aid Society, Lauren clerked for two years for the Honorable James L. Dennis on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in New Orleans, Louisiana. Lauren graduated from Cardozo Law School in 2013, and from Trinity College in 2008.

Huwe Burton was exonerated on January, 24, 2019, after spending 19 years in prison for a murder he did not commit. At 16 years old, Huwe was convicted of the 1989 murder of his mother, who had been found stabbed to death in their New York City home. His conviction was largely based on a false confession that had been coerced by detectives. After a joint reinvestigation between the Innocence Project and the Bronx District Attorney's Conviction Integrity Unit, his 1991 murder conviction was vacated. Today, Huwe is a dedicated advocate against wrongful convictions. He actively participates in the Innocence Project's Speakers Bureau, sharing his personal story to educate diverse audiences about wrongful convictions and to highlight the vital work of the organization. In addition, he collaborates closely with the Innocence Project's Policy Department to champion essential federal and state legislative reforms designed to uncover and address wrongful convictions.

Narrative

Police-induced false confessions are a leading cause of wrongful conviction. Scientific research has identified the police interrogation tactics that place an innocent, wrongfully accused suspect at risk of falsely admitting guilt during police interrogation. However, many of the tactics that can induce false confessions are considered lawful and, therefore, are regularly disregarded by courts and attorneys, allowing for coerced, false confessions to be admitted into evidence. To help remedy this problem, the Innocence Project, alongside Innocence Network partners across the country, has been advocating for legislative and judicial reforms that would prohibit or deter police from using tactics that place the innocent at risk of false confession and, consequently, wrongful conviction.

During this presentation you will hear from Lauren Gottesman, a Senior Staff Attorney at the Innocence Project, whose work focuses on coercive police interrogation and false confessions. You will also hear from Huwe Burton, an advocate for interrogation reform, who himself falsely confessed in response to police coercion at age 16. Join us to learn about the phenomenon of false confessions, the tragic miscarriages of justice that often follow a police-induced false confession, and the reform initiatives that can help prevent such injustices.

Learning Objectives

- List and identify three scientifically-established personal and situational “risk factors” of false confessions
- Describe the reason that false confessions, once elicited, are so likely to lead to wrongful conviction
- Identify two recent reform initiatives that help to prevent false confessions, and where those reforms have taken hold