

For immediate release: April 19, 2017
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<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/>

Rodricus Crawford Exonerated from Louisiana Death Row

Caddo Parish Prosecutors Drop Charges After Medical Evidence Suggests No Crime Occurred

(Washington, D.C.) At the request of local prosecutors, a Caddo Parish, Louisiana trial court has [dismissed all charges](#) against Rodricus Crawford, making him the 158th person exonerated from death row in the United States since 1973 and the second to be exonerated this year. Mr. Crawford had been wrongly convicted and sentenced to death in 2012 for the murder of his one-year-old son, Roderius Lott, despite medical evidence that the child actually died of a combination of pneumonia and sepsis.

“In many respects, this case may reflect both the past and future of the death penalty in America,” said Robert Dunham, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. “A jurisdiction with a history of racial bias, prosecutorial misconduct, and overuse of the death penalty chose to pursue a death sentence against a grieving father, despite evidence that his child had unexpectedly died of natural causes. But as in increasing numbers of counties across the country, local voters were put off by these types of abusive prosecution practices and elected a new District Attorney, who took a fresh look at the evidence and acted in the interests of justice.”

Mr. Crawford’s case attracted national attention amid evidence of race discrimination, prosecutorial excess, and scientifically false forensic testimony. During trial, prosecutor Dale Cox—who personally prosecuted 1/3 of all the cases in which Louisiana juries returned death sentences between 2010-2015—presented testimony from a local doctor that Mr. Crawford’s infant son had been suffocated. However, autopsy results showed pervasive bronchopneumonia in the baby’s lungs and sepsis in his blood. Cox later told the jury that Jesus Christ would have imposed the death penalty against Mr. Crawford.

In 2014, two years after the trial, Cox wrote an internal memorandum stating that Mr. Crawford “deserves as much physical suffering as it is humanly possible to endure before he dies.” Cox gained national notoriety a year later when, as Acting District Attorney, he told *The Shreveport Times* that he thought the state needed to “kill more people.”

In November 2016, the Louisiana Supreme Court overturned Mr. Crawford’s conviction, ruling that Cox had exercised the government’s discretionary jury strikes on the basis of race to unconstitutionally exclude black jurors from serving in the case. When the parish’s new District Attorney, James Stewart, re-examined the evidence in the case, he asked the court to drop the charges against Mr. Crawford.

Caddo Parish is one of five major U.S. counties in which local voters have replaced prosecutors known for aggressive use of the death penalty with new prosecutors who promised systemic criminal justice reforms, including reduced reliance on capital punishment.^[1] “With these new prosecutors, we are seeing a greater commitment to fairness, one that we hope will translate into greater efforts to correct the miscarriages of justice that have resulted in condemning innocent people to death,” Dunham said.

With the formal dropping of charges, Rodricus Crawford becomes the 11th person exonerated from Louisiana’s death row, and the second from Caddo Parish. In 2014, Glenn Ford was released from Louisiana’s death row after 30 years. A death sentence imposed on Corey Williams, an intellectually disabled Caddo Parish prisoner who was 16 at the time of his alleged

crime, has been overturned, but he is still serving a life sentence despite evidence that his confession was coerced and that others committed the offense for which he was condemned.

The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) today added Mr. Crawford to its Innocence List at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/innocence-list-those-freed-death-row>. To be included on DPIC's Innocence List, defendants must have been convicted, sentenced to death and subsequently either: (a) been acquitted of all charges related to the crime that placed them on death row, or (b) had all charges related to the crime that placed them on death row dismissed by the prosecution or the courts, or (c) been granted a complete pardon based on evidence of innocence.

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[1] See Voters Oust Prosecutors in Outlier Death Penalty Counties, Retain Governors Who Halted Executions, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/6600>; Florida Prosecutor, Public Defender Tied to Outlier Death Penalty Practices Suffer Landslide Election Loss, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/6550>

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