

**For immediate release**

Contact: Margot Friedman at 202-332-5550 or 202-330-9295 (cell)

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/>

## **Mississippi Man is Exonerated from Death Row**

**Willie Manning Becomes 153<sup>rd</sup> Person Added to the Death Penalty Information Center's Innocence List; May Have Been Wrongfully Convicted of Two Sets of Murders**

***Second of Two Cases Turns on FBI's False Testimony about Hair and Bullet Matches***

(Washington, D.C.) The Death Penalty Information Center has added death-row inmate Willie Jerome Manning to its list of death-row exonerations after a Mississippi trial court granted the prosecution's motion to dismiss all charges against him arising out of the 1993 murders of an elderly woman and her daughter. Mr. Manning is the 153<sup>rd</sup> person exonerated from death row since 1973 and the fourth from Mississippi. Mr. Manning remains on death row pending the results of DNA testing that could exonerate him in the murders of two Mississippi college students after the FBI admitted that its agents provided two different types of flawed forensic testimony in that case.

"It is always stunning when a man is exonerated from death row with evidence of his innocence, but Mr. Manning's case presents the unimaginable possibility that an innocent man may have been wrongly convicted and sentenced to death in two different trials for two different offenses," said Robert Dunham, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC). "His cases present some of the classic hallmarks of innocence: racial overtones, unreliable witnesses, and police or prosecutorial misconduct. His second case includes an additional horrifying dimension – two different types of junk science masquerading as forensic evidence of his guilt."

Mr. Manning's exoneration comes in the wake of a ruling by the Mississippi Supreme Court in February granting him a new trial because prosecutors had violated his rights by failing to disclose evidence that undermined the heart of the charges against him. At his trial, the prosecution's key witness claimed to have seen Mr. Manning enter the victims' apartment. However, police notes that the prosecution wrongfully withheld from the defense showed the apartment in which the witness said he lived with his girlfriend was actually vacant at the time of the murder and records from the apartment complex did not list the witness or his

girlfriend as a resident. In a sworn affidavit and at an evidentiary hearing, that witness has since recanted his testimony.

In the second case, Mr. Manning, who is African American, was convicted for the 1992 murder of two white college students. In addition to the testimony of a jailhouse informant, the prosecution relied on an FBI expert who provided scientifically flawed hair-comparison testimony and an FBI ballistics expert who improperly testified that bullets found in a tree outside Mr. Manning's house had to have come from the same gun used to kill the students.

In 2013, Mr. Manning came within hours of being executed. The Mississippi Supreme Court stayed his execution because the Justice Department admitted in separate letters to his attorneys that the FBI's bullet and hair analysis "exceeded the limits of science and was, therefore, invalid."

Today, Mr. Manning's name was added to DPIC's Innocence List at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/innocence-list-those-freed-death-row>

For inclusion 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 (c) been granted a complete pardon based on evidence of innocence.

To reach Mr. Manning's attorneys, please contact Margot Friedman at [mfriedman@dupontcirclecommunications.com](mailto:mfriedman@dupontcirclecommunications.com) or 202-332-5550. To reach Robert Dunham, DPIC's Executive Director, please call 202-289-2275 or email [rdunham@deathpenaltyinfo.org](mailto:rdunham@deathpenaltyinfo.org).

###

The Death Penalty Information Center ([www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)) is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. DPIC was founded in 1990 and prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for the media, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue.