

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 336
Richard Jones
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
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My name is Richard Jones and I spent 16 years in prison for a crime I did not commit. I hope you will support this legislation so that wrongfully convicted people like me receive the financial resources we need to restart our lives that were unjustly taken by the state.

In 1999 the state of Kansas charged me with aggravated robbery at a Walmart in Johnston County. I was in disbelief because I did not live near there and had never been to that Walmart. It must be a mix up, I thought, and everything would be cleared up at my trial. That didn't happen. I broke down and cried when I heard the guilty verdict. It was one of the darkest days in my life.

There are no words to describe what it's like to be behind bars for a crime you know you didn't commit. When I was convicted I had two daughters, one three years old and the other just a newborn baby. When I was exonerated this past June, I came home to adult daughters. My oldest daughter came to visit me a couple of times, but I never got to see my younger daughter throughout my incarceration.

For 16 years, it felt like no one would listen to me. Every morning I woke up confined to a place that I didn't deserve to be in. It's a struggle to physically survive in such a violent place. In fact, I got stabbed twice during my last year in prison. The worst part of being in prison was when my kids told me over the phone about the problems they were going through and I couldn't be there to help them.

Thankfully, the Midwest Innocence Project and University of Kansas School of Law Project for Innocence took my case. Finally on June 7, 2017 my conviction was vacated and the prosecutor dismissed the charges. After so many years of hoping and praying, the truth finally came out and I was free.

But it has been really difficult to rebuild my life without any financial assistance from the state of Kansas. It feels like there is no accountability. When I got out of prison the financial help I got was from an online fundraising account. Generous people from across the country heard my story and donated, but they weren't the ones who put me in prison for a crime I didn't commit. The state of Kansas tried and convicted me for a crime I did not commit, yet it hasn't compensated me in any way for the 16 years I lost.

After all that I've been through I'm living hand to mouth. It is difficult to find a job without a work history. It is also difficult to build relationships with my family. There is a barrier between us because it's hard for them to understand what I went through. My daughters were babies when I left, and they still feel the pain of growing up without a father. To have the opportunity to seek a declaration from the state of Kansas that I am in fact innocent of this crime would mean so much to me and my family.

This legislation would also provide much-needed financial assistance for me and other wrongfully convicted people to reenter a world we never should have been taken from. After so many years of suffering for crimes we didn't commit, this bill would take a big step in giving us justice.