

## **Davis County attorney creates avenue to review innocence claims in felony convictions**

Conviction Integrity Unit to review claims of factual innocence by people convicted of crimes

<https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/11/1/22758284/davis-county-attorney-creates-diverse-conviction-integrity-unit-innocence-crime>

By Pat Reavy, KSL.com Nov 1, 2021, 5:12pm MDT

Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings, left, talks with Teneille Brown, center, and Adrienne Gillespie Andrews.

Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings, left, talks with law professor Teneille Brown, center, and Adrienne Gillespie Andrews, assistant vice president for diversity and chief diversity officer at Weber State University after a press conference at the Davis County Administration Building in Farmington announcing the establishment of a Conviction Integrity Unit on Monday, Nov. 1, 2021. Brown and Andrews were named to the unit. Scott G Winterton, Deseret News

Prior to Monday, Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings had only held two press conferences since taking office in 2007.

On Monday, because of how passionately he feels about the project, he held his third to announce the formation of his office's Conviction Integrity Unit.

"We went through a process because we are determined to be the best integrity unit in the state," Rawlings said. "We made an effort to recruit the best people we could get and we did that. Mission accomplished."

The purpose of the new unit is to review claims of factual innocence by people convicted in Davis County of felony crimes. Rawlings is not the first to put together such a team. Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill announced his five-member Conviction Integrity Unit in 2018.

Rawlings' team will consist of nine members. He said the person he wanted to lead the team from the beginning, retired 2nd District Judge Glen Dawson, accepted his invitation to head up the group. Other members include defense attorney Ed Brass, retired 3rd District and Utah Court of Appeals Judge Stephen L. Roth, and attorney Chris Shaw.

But not everyone in the group is a current or former judge, prosecutor or defense attorney. And Rawlings said that's on purpose.

"We want people who are passionate about the criminal justice system being fair, treating people right, getting it right," he said.

Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings announces the creation of a Conviction Integrity Unit during a press conference at the Davis County Administration Building in Farmington on Monday, Nov. 1, 2021.

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The unit also includes Teneille Brown, a professor with the University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law; Marina Lowe with the American Civil Liberties Union; Adrienne Gillespie Andrews, assistant vice president for diversity and chief diversity officer at Weber State University; Molly Davis with the Libertas Institute; and former Davis County Sheriff Bud Cox.

"We recruited the best, we solicited the best, and we got the best," Rawlings said of his diverse group. "I'm telling you that the group we selected that will be hearing these cases in Davis County, we got it right."

"Each member will bring a different perspective and viewpoint to the analysis of each application we receive," Dawson added.

In order for a person to apply to have the Conviction Integrity Unit review their case, that person must still be alive and must have been convicted of a felony in Davis County in a case prosecuted by the Davis County Attorney's Office. They must also have exhausted all other legal appeals. The group will give priority in reviewing cases to people who are still currently incarcerated.

"The application for review must be based on credible and verifiable evidence of innocence, or new technologies that exist to test or retest remaining relevant evidence," according to the group.

Once the integrity unit reaches a decision, it will be forwarded to Rawlings who will decide at that point whether to dismiss a person's conviction based on the unit's recommendation. But Rawlings noted Monday it is unlikely he would go against the integrity unit's recommendation. People who want their cases reviewed can apply on the Conviction Integrity Unit's website.

Neither Rawlings nor Dawson believe that many people are unfairly convicted of a crime they didn't commit in Davis County.

"But in the end, we have to acknowledge as humans, that despite every safeguard and precaution, an innocent person may be convicted. I believe this happens very rarely. But it can happen and that is why we think that the implementation of this unit provides an essential added resource to the criminal justice system as it currently exists," Dawson said.

"We're not setting it up because we think we have problems," Rawlings added.

Rawlings said as the county's top prosecutor, he has an obligation to ensure there is fairness and balance in the criminal justice system. He calls the unit another tool to make sure the county gets it right.

"They're going to ensure that justice is served in Davis County," he said.