

Davis County panel to review cases of convicted people who maintain their innocence

This is the fourth Conviction Integrity Unit in Utah, with others in Salt Lake, Summit and Utah counties.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings, speaks during a news conference at Salt Lake County District Attorney's building on March 1, 2021. Rawlings announced Monday that his office has formed a conviction integrity unit to review the convictions of people who maintain that they are innocent.

By Jessica Miller

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Farmington • Davis County has joined a growing list of Utah prosecutors' offices that are creating panels to review the convictions of people who maintain that they are innocent.

Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings announced Monday that his office has formed a nine-person conviction integrity unit that will consider applications of people who say they were wrongfully convicted of charges and decide whether each conviction should be overturned.

It marks the fourth review panel of its kind in Utah.

Rawlings' team is a mix of lawyers — including retired judges and prosecutors, and a defense attorney — as well as a former sheriff and two people who work in higher education. It's unique compared to other, similar bodies in Utah in that it also has two members who have advocated for criminal justice reform for the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah and Libertas Institute.

"We want that perspective," Rawlings said. "We want people who are passionate about the criminal justice system, treating people right and getting it right."

Davis County's Conviction Integrity Unit will include:

- Glen Dawson, retired district court judge
- Teneille Brown, University of Utah law professor
- Bud Cox, former Davis County sheriff
- Chris Shaw, retired prosecutor
- Marina Lowe, advocate and lobbyist for ACLU and others
- Dstephen Roth, retired appeals court judge
- Adrienne Gillespie Andrews, assistant vice president for diversity at Weber State University
- Ed Brass, defense attorney
- Molly Davis, policy analyst for the Libertas Institute

The volunteer team will be led by Glen Dawson, a retired Davis County judge.

Dawson said Monday that while most in the criminal justice system strive to do things right, it's possible that mistakes have been made along the way.

"We have to acknowledge that as humans, despite every safeguarding precaution, an innocent person may be convicted," he said. "I believe that this happens very rarely, but it can happen."

Dawson pointed to a case he presided over, where Rawlings asked for a conviction to be vacated for a 17-year-old boy who was found guilty in a 1996 fatal shooting of a Motel 6 night clerk during a botched robbery. [Rawlings said then that the teen didn't get a fair trial](#), and he felt the conviction should be tossed.

"He did the right thing," Dawson said of Rawlings. "And that's why I'm excited to be a part of this group and to be involved in helping others in situations just like that."

Rawlings said that if this panel examines a case and determines someone was wrongfully convicted, he'll ask a judge to vacate their sentence. Priority will be given to those who are currently incarcerated.

Those who [ask for a review](#) must be convicted of a felony, and the application must be based on "credible and verifiable evidence of innocence" or new technologies that now exist to test or retest relevant evidence.

There are nearly 90 conviction integrity units across the country, according [to the National Registry of Exonerations](#). The review panels have gained popularity in recent years as district attorneys have grappled with allegations of official misconduct, mistaken eyewitness testimony, false confessions or false accusations in past convictions.

In Utah, there are similar panels in [Salt Lake](#), Summit and [Utah counties](#).