



## FIRST US DEATH ROW DNA EXONEREE TO VISIT PORTLAND THIS WEEK

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May 9, 2016

PORTLAND, Ore. – Kirk Bloodsworth, the first person in the US to have spent time on death row and later be exonerated using DNA evidence, will visit Portland this week in support of Oregon Innocence Project. The organization is hosting two fundraising events at which Mr. Bloodsworth will be the special guest. Oregon Innocence Project is a nonprofit program dedicated to exonerating innocent Oregonians, promoting legal reforms that prevent and address wrongful convictions, and training law students, and is the only project of its kind in Oregon.

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>, a movie screening will take place at Living Room Theater in SW Portland of a new film about Kirk Bloodsworth: “Bloodsworth: An Innocent Man.” That event will also feature a question and answer session with Mr. Bloodsworth. All tickets for the screening have already been sold.

The next day, a benefit for Oregon Innocence Project will take place at Urban Studio in NW Portland. Kirk Bloodsworth will be the special guest at the event and speakers will also include House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, Oregon Innocence Project Co-Founder Janis Puracal, and Oregon Innocence Project Legal Director, Steve Wax. Tickets are still available.

“Kirk Bloodsworth’s story underscores the importance of having people dedicated to working on behalf of innocent people caught up in our justice system,” said Steve Wax, Legal Director of Oregon Innocence Project. “Kirk was convicted of murder and sentenced to death through mistaken eyewitness identification even though there was no physical evidence linking him to the crime. His ability to prove his innocence depended on the help of a sympathetic lawyer and the use of forensic science. Oregon Innocence Project provides that same assistance to Oregonians who have been convicted and are making a claim of innocence.”

Kirk Bloodsworth was wrongly convicted in 1985 of the murder of nine-year-old Dawn Hamilton in Maryland. He denied any involvement in the crime from the moment he was arrested. It was not until he learned about the then relatively new science of DNA testing in the early 1990s that he found the key to proving his innocence. Evidence from the crime scene was tested and showed that he was not the

perpetrator. Mr. Bloodsworth was released from prison in 1993. It was another decade before the real killer, Kimberly Shay Ruffner, was identified.

Since his release, Kirk Bloodsworth has made it his mission to fight for those who are wrongfully convicted and to oppose the death penalty. He works with the Philadelphia-based nonprofit Witness to Innocence, an organization that works to end the death penalty across the US. For many years, he was a tireless campaigner to end the death penalty in his home state of Maryland – a goal he and others achieved in 2013. The federal Postconviction DNA Testing Grant Program that provides funding to states to defray the costs of testing is named after him.

“We’re looking forward to welcoming Kirk to Oregon this week and hearing what he has to say,” said Wax. “In the two years since the founding of Oregon Innocence Project, we’ve received 200 applications which we’re reviewing and we’re formally involved in five cases. Our priority is to collaborate with others in the criminal justice system to ensure that no Oregonian experiences what Kirk Bloodsworth did.”

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**Opportunities are available to interview Kirk Bloodsworth on Thursday, May 12, in Portland. Please contact Alice Lundell for more information.**

NOTES TO EDITORS: Oregon Innocence Project (OIP) is a program of Oregon Justice Resource Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. OIP’s mission is to exonerate the wrongfully convicted, promote reforms that prevent and address wrongful convictions, and train law students.