



For Immediate Release

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Tony Hopps to be Released After 31 Years Wrongfully Incarcerated

Hopps' Convictions and Life Sentences Vacated After Conviction Review Unit of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office "no longer stand by the convictions"

Tampa, FL– Today after more 31 years wrongfully incarcerated, Tony Hopps will walk free from Hardee Correctional Institution in Bowling Green, Florida, as a result of a re-investigation by the Conviction Review Unit (CRU) in the office of Thirteenth Judicial Circuit State Attorney Andrew Warren, and an agreement to relief with Hopps' attorneys at the Innocence Project of Florida (IPF). CRU lead attorney Teresa Hall determined that the State can "no longer stand by the convictions." An agreed order vacating Hopps' convictions and life sentences was signed by Circuit Judge Lyann Goudie, based on the CRU's recommendation and an agreement by the parties. The State immediately dropped the charges.

Mr. Hopps, upon finding he would walk free, cried and said, "I have tried to get people to listen to me all these years and finally Teresa Hall from the State Attorney's Office took my case seriously."

Mr. Hopps was convicted of an armed burglary and armed robbery of an elderly couple who were staying at a motel in Tampa, Florida in 1990. Despite having an alibi, the jury convicted Mr. Hopps' based solely on the identifications by the two victims of Mr. Hopps as the perpetrator. Trial counsel did not move to suppress these identifications based on the use of improper procedures in procuring the identification evidence. Nor did counsel present available evidence to strengthen Mr. Hopps clear alibi. There was no additional physical or scientific evidence, nor corroborating witnesses, linking Mr. Hopps to the crime.

The CRU opened its investigation on May 12, 2020 after receiving a letter from Mr. Hopps. Ms. Hall initiated a reexamination of the case and began a comprehensive review of Mr. Hopps' claim of wrongful conviction. At the conclusion of its reinvestigation, the CRU made the following findings:

- a. The photo lineup procedure used by law enforcement in this case did not comport with best practices at the time of its administration and the resulting identifications would not be admissible today;
- b. Mr. Hopps did not match the description of the perpetrator provided by the victims;
- c. Witnesses at the time of trial, one new witness, and objective evidence from law enforcement reports provided an alibi for Mr. Hopps that put him in a location that was far enough from the scene of the crime that it is highly unlikely that he committed these crimes; and
- d. Mr. Hopps could not have been one of the men fleeing from the vehicle containing the victims' stolen belongings because he was indisputably in jail at the time.

Based on this, the CRU concluded that it could no longer stand behind these convictions and recommended vacating Mr. Hopps' convictions and dropping all charges. The CRU's report makes clear the troubling nature of how Mr. Hopps became a suspect in the first place and suggests that he was a victim of misidentification. Ms. Hall sought the assistance of IPF Executive Director Seth Miller to initiate postconviction proceedings on Mr. Hopps' behalf.

IPF Executive Director Seth Miller and counsel for Mr. Hopps said, "We are so thrilled Ms. Hall of the Hillsborough CRU chose to investigate Mr. Hopps' case and saw significant issues with the evidence to allow for the overturning of his convictions and life sentences. It is a testament to the State Attorney's commitment to achieving collaborative justice for the wrongfully convicted that we could right a miscarriage of justice even in a case that does not involve DNA."

The Innocence Project of Florida (IPF) represented Mr. Hopps in these proceedings. Since 2003, IPF has assisted in the release from wrongful incarceration of 27 innocent individuals who have collectively served more than 581 years in prison for the crimes of others. Located in Tallahassee, IPF's mission is to find and free the innocent in Florida prisons, help these individuals transition back into a changed society, and work to reform the criminal legal system to prevent future wrongful convictions. For more information, visit www.FloridaInnocence.org.

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