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**Three Juvenile Lifers Exonerated After Spending 36 Years in Prison**

For release – November 25, 2019

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Today, after spending two-thirds of their lives behind bars, Alfred Chestnut, Ransom Watkins, and Andrew Stewart were exonerated for a murder they did not commit and released from prison. The Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office agreed to vacate the convictions and dismiss all charges against the three men.

In November 1983, Mr. Chestnut and Mr. Watkins, who were each 16 years old, and Mr. Stewart, who was 17 years old, were arrested for the shooting death of 14-year old DeWitt Duckett in the hallway of Harlem Park Junior High School. What became known as one of the first "clothing murders," DeWitt was allegedly killed for his Georgetown team jacket. Mr. Chestnut had a similar jacket, which was purchased by his mother and, upon being seized by the police, had no blood, hair, or damage of any kind.

The three boys were convicted in May 1984, based primarily on testimony from school officials that they were in the school earlier that day; Mr. Chestnut's jacket; and four teenage witnesses who identified Messrs. Chestnut, Watkins and Stewart.

A re-investigation conducted by the Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU) of the Baltimore City State's Attorney Office confirmed that (a) the boys had left the school prior to the shooting, (b) Mr. Chestnut's jacket was in fact purchased by his mother, and (c) that the four teenage eyewitnesses had been heavily coached and credibly recanted their statements. The one eyewitness who was with the victim at the time had previously identified another individual who is believed to be the actual shooter.

Mr. Chestnut's attorneys, Elizabeth Hilliard, assistant public defender with the Maryland Office of the Public Defender, and Brianna Ford, Deputy Director of the University of Baltimore Innocence Project Clinic, issue the following statement:

"For 36 years, and a day, Alfred Chestnut has been telling his truth. He has tirelessly advocated for not just himself, but also his two codefendants, and that tenacity is what brings us here today. We are so grateful to the Conviction Integrity Unit for acknowledging his innocence and finally bringing him home to his mom. We also hope that his story inspires other innocent people, who are still incarcerated, to keep telling their own truth and not give up hope."

Paul DeWolfe, Public Defender of Maryland:

“This was a high profile case involving tragic violence on school grounds, in which the police ignored evidence from their own investigation suggesting these boys were innocent. As a result, the three men walking free today each lost decades of their life – decades when others their age started families, established careers, and experienced the joys and tribulations of entering and experiencing adulthood. While we are pleased to have their names cleared and their freedom restored, nothing can provide Mr. Chestnut, Mr. Stewart and Mr. Watkins with time that they have lost.”

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Baltimore City State’s Attorney’s Office CIU, the UB Innocence Project Clinic and the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (MAIP) through a partnership funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. In the past year and a half, four other individuals have been exonerated based on the efforts of this partnership. The UB Innocence Project Clinic was established in 2008 as a joint project of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender and the University of Baltimore School of Law; it is also affiliated with MAIP.

Mr. Chestnut is represented by the Maryland Office of the Public Defender and the UB Innocence Project Clinic; Mr. Watkins is represented by the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project and the Law Office of Christopher C. Nieto; and Mr. Stewart is represented by the law firm Nathans & Biddle, LLP.

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