

First Person Finds Home Under California's Wrongfully Convicted Housing Assistance Law

Wednesday, July 1, 2020

After 18 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, Jeremy Puckett becomes first exoneree in the country to move into a home with help from the State. Sacramento Kings and other local businesses welcome Jeremy home.

Sacramento- In 2002 Jeremy Puckett received a life sentence for a murder in Sacramento County. From day one he claimed his innocence. After 18 years in prison, and with legal help from the Northern California Innocence Project, in March of this year he was finally exonerated and released from custody.

Exonerees face many challenges immediately following their release from prison. Perhaps the most pressing need is to find a place to live. With no income, no credit history, and little else, many exonerees turn to their families, friends, or even their lawyers for temporary shelter.

"Every exoneree I've spoken to says that finding a place to live is the first step to rebuilding their lives, and it's nearly impossible to find a house to rent with no income and only prison time on your application," said Obie Anthony, founder of Exonerated Nation (EN), a national non-profit that helps the wrongfully convicted. Anthony himself was wrongfully convicted and spent 17 years of a life sentence in California prisons before winning his freedom in 2011.

EN and the California Attorneys for Criminal Justice (CACJ) a statewide association of criminal defense attorneys in private practice and working in public defender offices, teamed up with Assembly member Shirley Weber (San Diego) on Assembly Bill 701, which was passed in 2019 and took effect January 1st is this year.

The bill requires the State of California to pay housing costs, such as move-in deposits and monthly rents, for exonerees for up to four years.

"It would be a further injustice if we just release someone and tell them good luck, you're on your own. It was our mistake that took so many years of their life away from them" stated Assembly member Shirley Weber who authored AB 701 "We have an obligation to get exonerees on their feet again. We wish Jeremy the best in his new home."

California is the first state in the country to provide housing assistance to the wrongfully convicted upon their release from prison.

This past weekend Puckett moved into his new home in Sacramento, which was only possible with the financial assistance provided by AB 701.

He was greeted by a surprise zoom housewarming party attended by Assembly member Weber, Obie Anthony, his legal team from Northern California Innocence Project and reps from CACJ and Lyon Property Management who worked with Puckett on his rental application, qualifications and found a house for him.

“When I was released, I really didn’t know how I was going to find a place to live. I was relieved to finally be free, but worried about what was next. Without AB 701, I don’t know where I would be.”

As part of his housewarming, Jeremy also received a welcome home package with gifts from local restaurant House Kitchen and the Sacramento Kings.

“The Kings organization has been very active in exploring the problems with our criminal justice system, according to Galen VP, Kings Academy and Professional Development who presented Jeremy with a signed Marvin Bagley jersey. “We wanted to welcome Jeremy back home and let him know that he is not alone, that the Sacramento Kings and the larger community are here for him as he rebuilds his life.”

"Wrongful convictions are the byproduct of a deeply flawed criminal justice system. While we work to fix it the community and the State have the responsibility to help exonerees return to normal life" concluded Stephen Munkelt, Executive Director of the California Attorneys for Criminal Justice.

Read more (<https://a79.asmdc.org/press-releases/20200701-first-person-finds-home-under-californias-wrongfully-%C2%A0convicted-housing>)

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