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## News from the Innocence Network

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## Innocence Network Announces Awards for Champion of Justice and Journalism

Awards will be presented to Former Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro and *Frontline* producers Ofra Bikel and Ted Gesing on April 8<sup>th</sup> during annual conference in Cincinnati

(NEW YORK, NY; April 4, 2011) – The Innocence Network, an affiliation of organizations that provide pro bono legal and investigative services for wrongfully convicted people, today announced the winners of its second-annual national awards for public service and investigative journalism. The Champion of Justice Award for public service will be awarded to former Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro, and the Journalism Award will be given to PBS *Frontline* producers Ofra Bikel and Ted Gesing. The awards will be presented at the eleventh-annual Innocence Network Conference on wrongful convictions and criminal justice reforms on Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup> in Cincinnati.

“It’s an honor to recognize people whose work highlights the shortcomings of the criminal justice system and engages the public and law enforcement to help overturn and reduce wrongful convictions in our country,” said Keith Findley, President of the Innocence Network, Co-Director of the Wisconsin Innocence Project and Clinical Professor at University of Wisconsin Law School. “This year’s winners of both the Champion of Justice Award and the Journalism Award couldn’t be more deserving. They have each made tremendous contributions that have made the criminal justice system more just.”

**The Champion of Justice Award** honors public servants who go above and beyond in supporting and championing efforts that free the wrongfully convicted and/or reform the criminal justice system to prevent wrongful convictions. Award recipient Jim Petro has been a practicing attorney for over 37 years in a career that has included co-founding a successful law firm, partnership in one of Ohio’s largest law firms and service as Attorney General of Ohio. As Attorney General, Petro championed the use of DNA evidence in criminal prosecutions and soon realized that DNA was proving the innocence of many people who were wrongfully convicted. Petro and his wife Nancy co-authored “False Justice – Eight Myths that Convict the Innocent” (Kaplan Publishing) that examines DNA exonerations to identify the factors that cause wrongful convictions.

**The Journalism Award** honors investigative reporting that brings to life the process of identifying and exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals. Recipients Ofra Bikel and Ted Gesing are receiving the award for their documentary “The Confessions” that appeared on PBS’s *Frontline*. Bikel has spent most of her long and productive career as a documentarian giving voice to the wrongfully convicted, with her work often helping to free the innocent. Gesing is a producer and director of non-fiction media and has worked with Bikel for the past four years. In *The Confessions*, which tells the story of four U.S. Naval sailors who were wrongfully convicted of rape, Bikel and Gesing took on the difficult issue of false confessions and explores the factors that cause innocent people to confess to crimes they didn’t do. Other documentaries by Bikel that have championed the wrongfully convicted include the *Innocence Lost Trilogy*, *The Case of Innocence* and *Snitch*.

The Champion of Justice awards were decided by a committee of the Innocence Network Board of Directors, based on nominations from the public. The Journalism Award was selected by a panel of five judges who reviewed nominations from the public. The judges were Cynthia Tucker, a writer for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*; Maurice Possley, a former investigative reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* who is now an investigator and researcher for the Northern California Innocence Project at Santa Clara University School of Law; Bob Paynter, a recently retired journalist who worked for the *Akron Beacon Journal* and the *Plain Dealer*; Jami Floyd, an attorney, news anchor (most recently at Court-TV, which became TruTV) and legal analyst; and Melba Newsome, a freelance writer who specializes in investigative reporting and has been published in *Time*, the *New York Times*, *O: The Oprah Magazine* and others.

The Innocence Network has become a crucial resource for the wrongfully convicted and their families. It now includes 65 member organizations, 56 of which are in the United States. Each organization operates independently but they coordinate to share information and expertise. For more on the Innocence Network, go to: [www.innocencenetwork.org](http://www.innocencenetwork.org). For more on the eleventh-annual network conference, which the Ohio Innocence Project is hosting, go to: [www.2011innocenceconference.com](http://www.2011innocenceconference.com).

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