

Life After Exoneration Program



The nightmare of wrongful conviction and incarceration does not end with an exonerees release from prison. The exonerated face serious challenges in virtually every aspect of rebuilding their lives on the outside, including employment, housing, financial resources, support systems, and access to medical, psychological and dental care. In most cases, exonerees are pushed out the prison door without as much as an apology, and left to fend for themselves.

The Life After Exoneration Program (LAEP) is the only national organization dedicated to helping survivors of wrongful conviction re-enter society and rebuild their lives. LAEP is working to ensure that exonerees have access to badly needed services. LAEP is helping to build a community of the exonerated. LAEP is supporting policy reform on behalf of the exonerated.

Traumatized by their Experience

A recent LAEP study of sixty exonerees nationwide confirmed that exonerees have considerable difficulty rebuilding their lives:

- Half were living with family members.
- Two-thirds were not financially independent.
- One-third lost custody of their children as a result of their wrongful incarceration.
- At least a quarter suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Let Down by Society a Second Time

Most people do not realize that thirty states have no law providing compensation for an innocent person who wrongfully convicted for the time he or she spent in prison. In the states that do have compensation statutes, the amount can be meager and the process to qualify for it is difficult for most exonerees to negotiate.

What re-entry services are available to parolees are not available to exonerees. In most instances, a conviction remains on the exonerees record, even after the individual has proven innocence, thereby making it difficult for the exoneree to get a job, rent an apartment, or get credit.

LAEP assists exonerees and their family members in re-building their lives on the outside, by working to secure their physical,

spiritual, psychological, social and economic well being. LAEP does this by:

- Coordinating Direct Services to Exonerees
- Building a Network of the Exonerated
- Supporting Legislative and Policy Change

LAEP Coordinates Direct Services for Exonerees

The Need: Exonerees face a broad range of challenges as they try to rebuild their lives after wrongful incarceration. Most exonerees need psychological counseling, medical and dental treatment, job training and job counseling, and legal help. Our primary goal is to ensure that exonerees and their family members get access to the services they need.

How LAEP is Getting It Done: We begin by assessing the needs of the individual exoneree, then work with social service providers, medical, dental and mental health providers, and employers in the exoneree's community to ensure that the services they provide are adapted to the specific needs of exonerees, which are often particular to the experience of wrongful conviction. We are developing a model state policy for services to exonerees with states where exonerees reside in larger numbers. We provide remote intensive case management services when necessary. Although LAEP has coordinated direct services for 57 exonerees in 22 states, many more need our help.

LAEP also works to match exonerees with pro bono legal service providers in their communities. LAEP clients are currently receiving free legal representation with obtaining compensation, getting their records expunged, obtaining public benefits, and child custody. LAEP is working with several national law firms to assist in staffing cases.

LAEP Helps Maintain a Network of Exonerees

The Need: Exonerees are their own best mutual support system, but do not generally have the opportunity to connect with each other. It means a lot when you can speak with someone who really knows what it was like to be convicted of something you did not do, then sent to prison, where no one believes you when you say that you really are innocent.

How LAEP is Getting it Done: LAEP is building a network of exonerees, pairing recently released exonerees with those who were exonerated some time ago, building a system of mentors for exonerees and organizing periodic gatherings of exonerees around

Vietnam To Award Compensation

Vietnam's National Assembly has received unanimous public feedback supporting a resolution mandating compensation for a person wrongly convicted. Vietnam's legislature solicits public comments to gauge the pulse of the people. The primary concern of the nearly 1,000 people who expressed opinions about the resolution, had to do with how effectively it would be executed. Many respondents noted that legal officials regularly bend the law to their own purposes, so they had doubts about how faithfully the resolution letter, or spirit, would be followed. Particularly since the resolution did not mandate a specific formula for compensating a wrongly convicted person.

Source: Voters' Petitions Examined Thoroughly, *Vietnam News Agency*, Hanoi, Vietnam, November 24, 2005.

the country. We are also trying to help create an online community of exonerees.

LAEP Works for Legislative Reform and Policy Changes

The Need: An essential part of any long-term solution to helping the exonerated rebuild their lives is the establishment of compensation statutes in every state that fairly evaluate compensation claims and offer holistic remedies: social services, job training and expungement, in addition to monetary compensation.

How LAEP is Getting It Done: LAEP has convened a national working group on compensation legislation to develop guidelines for fair compensation, and study the effectiveness of current compensation systems. We are providing support to the advocacy efforts of our partners as they seek legislative reform.

LAEP Is a Non-Profit Organization

The Life After Exoneration Program is a public charity exempt from Federal income tax under IRS Code sections 501(c)(3) and 509(a)(1).

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