

Robert Wilson Settles Lawsuit For \$3.6 Million For Almost 10 Years Of Wrongful Imprisonment

Robert Wilson has settled his lawsuit against the City of Chicago for 9 years and 9 months of wrongful imprisonment for \$3.6 million.

Twenty-four year old June Siler's face and neck were slashed by a man wielding a box cutter while she was waiting at a bus stop in Chicago on February 28, 1997. Siler, a white woman, described her attacker as a black male in his early twenties with a mustache and a medium complexion who stood about five feet seven inches and wore black Velcro shoes.

The next day 41-year-old Robert Wilson was arrested by the Chicago PD while waiting for a bus at the same stop where Siler was attacked. He fit the general description of Siler's assailant, except he was almost twice as old. No Velcro shoes or box cutter was found during a search of Wilson's home.

After almost 30 hours of intermittent interrogation Wilson confessed to the attack, although he recanted it as coerced, and after hesitation, Siler identified Wilson from a photo lineup.

Within two weeks after Wilson's arrest five more white victims were slashed by a black man matching Siler's assailant, and all the attacks took place within roughly a one-mile radius of where she was slashed. The attacker was captured fleeing the scene of the last assault. He was Jerry Wagner, a 21-year-old black man, 5'-7" tall and wearing black Velcro shoes. Wagner was only questioned about the five assaults that occurred after Wilson's arrest. He confessed that he committed them because God ordered him to attack white people.

During his trial in 1999 Wilson testified he was coerced into falsely confessing after being interrogated for many hours during which he was threatened with beatings and police refused to give him medication for high blood pressure. Siler made an in-court identification of Wilson as her assailant. The trial judge sustained the prosecution's objection to the admitting of any testimony that Wagner confessed to committing the five attacks after Wilson's arrest, and that he perfectly matched Siler's description of her assailant.



Robert Wilson
(Center on Wrongful
Convictions)

Wilson was convicted by a jury based on his repudiated confession and Siler's testimony. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Wilson's conviction was affirmed on direct appeal, and the Illinois court's denied his pro se post-conviction petition. Wilson then filed a habeas corpus petition in federal court with pro bono representation by the Center on Wrongful Convictions. Wilson's key claim related to the trial judge's refusal to admit the third-party culprit evidence that Wagner was the person who likely attacked Siler. Wilson's lawyers argued that if the jury had that evidence it is probable the outcome of his trial would have been different. Although the State of Illinois vigorously defended Wilson's conviction, U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo [granted Wilson's](#) petition on October 20, 2006. Judge Castillo ordered Wilson's release within ninety days unless the State initiated his retrial.

Three weeks after Wilson was granted a new trial, the *Chicago Tribune* published a [front page story](#) that quoted Siler as saying, "I have not a doubt in my mind that it was not Robert Wilson. I have to make this right." She also said that before Wilson's trial she learned another man -- Wagner -- had been arrested for five similar attacks, but the police and prosecutors refused to show a picture of him, telling her Wilson confessed.

After Siler publicly stated she was convinced of Wilson's innocence and thus wouldn't be a compliant witness for the prosecution if he was retried, the prosecution agreed to dismiss the charges against him. On December 4, 2006 Wilson's conviction was vacated and he was released that day after 9 years and 9 months of wrongful imprisonment from the time of his arrest. Wilson, 51, [told reporters](#), "I feel blessed; it's one of the happiest days of my life. I'm free from the penitentiary. I can't ask for anything better."

In July 2007 [Wilson filed](#) a federal civil rights lawsuit that named the City of Chicago, Cook County, and several police officers as defendants. Wilson alleged the police falsified evidence, manipulated Siler into falsely identifying him by using a suggestive photo lineup, and coerced Wilson into falsely confessing.

On October 30, 2008 Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich pardoned Robert Wilson on the basis of his actual innocence.

The settlement of Wilson's lawsuit for \$3.6 million [was approved](#) by a committee of the Chicago City Council on March 12, 2012. Wilson, now 56, has to pay his attorney fees and costs out of the settlement amount. So he can expect to receive more than \$2 million.

After the settlement was announced, Wilson's lawyer, Locke Bowman, [told reporters](#) the Chicago PD has "steadfastly kept its head in the sand" and hasn't conducted an "investigation" of what went wrong to cause Wilson's conviction.

The three key Chicago PD officers involved in Wilson's prosecution have never been disciplined and are still employed by the Chicago Police Department.

Sources:

[City of Chicago to pay](#) man \$3.6 million for wrongful conviction, *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 12, 2012

["I have to make this right,"](#) *Chicago Tribune*, November 15, 2006

[Man files suit for conviction mistake](#), *Chicago Tribune*, July 18, 2007

[Wilson et al v. O'Brien et al](#), No. 1:2007cv03994, Illinois Northern District Court, July 17, 2007

This is the story of Karlyn Eklof, a young woman delivered into the hands of a psychotic killer. She witnessed him commit a murder and she is currently serving two life sentences in Oregon for that crime. *Improper Submission* by Erma Armstrong documents:

- The way the killer's psychotic bragging was used by the prosecution against Karlyn.
- The way exculpatory and witness impeachment evidence was hidden from the defense.
- The way erroneous assertions by the prosecution were used by the media, judges reviewing the case, and even by her own lawyers to avoid looking at the record that reveals her innocence.

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