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MI AG Nessel Launches Conviction Integrity Unit

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LANSING – Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel today launched her new Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU) within the department's Criminal Appellate Division. The unit will investigate credible claims of innocence to ensure no one is convicted of a crime they didn't actually commit. Nessel tapped highly respected and experienced criminal defense attorney Robyn B. Frankel to lead the unit.

The unit will investigate and determine whether there is substantial evidence that reveals that the convicted person was wrongfully accused and convicted. It will also develop strategies to rectify wrongful convictions.

"We have a duty to ensure those convicted of state crimes by county prosecutors and our office are in fact guilty of those crimes," Nessel said. "By establishing this unit, we will work to make certain those

ethical and legal obligations are met while providing justice to those wrongfully imprisoned and keeping dangerous offenders out of Michigan communities.”

Modeled after the successful Conviction Integrity Unit founded by Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy and headed by Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Valerie Newman, the unit will review eligible claims of innocence arising from state-law convictions in each of Michigan’s counties (other than Wayne County) using existing court records and any newly discovered evidence submitted by claimants.

In cases where further review is merited, the unit will work in tandem with county prosecutors, law enforcement, defense attorneys and innocence clinics. Moreover, where necessary, the unit will conduct its own investigation by interviewing victims, witnesses and testing physical evidence using the most updated scientific techniques to determine whether a claimant is innocent of the crime(s) for which he or she was convicted and sentenced.

Once a determination is made that a claimant convicted of a state crime in Michigan is actually innocent, Nessel, in her role as the top law enforcement officer in Michigan, will take the appropriate remedial action, which may include vacating the claimant’s conviction(s) and dismissing the charge(s) against them.

Frankel, who heads the unit, has more than 30 years of experience as a practicing attorney with expertise in trial and appellate court proceedings in both state and federal courts. She has served as an adjunct professor at Oakland University’s Paralegal Program, University of Michigan Law School’s appellate clinic and Detroit College of Law’s criminal trial practice clinic.

The unit plans to have an intake process in place no later than summer 2019.

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