

Wilson County man seeking exoneration hires attorneys



Andy Humbles, ahumbles@tennessean.com 12:44 p.m. CDT July 8, 2016



(Photo: File)

A Wilson County man who served 31 years in prison for rape that evidence later proved he didn't commit has hired attorneys in his continued attempt to be exonerated.

Lawrence McKinney, 60, is now being represented by attorneys David Raybin and Jack Lowery. McKinney was released from prison in 2009 after being cleared through DNA evidence of the rape he was found guilty of in 1978. McKinney's record has been expunged since his release, but he has never been exonerated, which would allow him to file for compensation.

The Tennessee Board of Parole reviews exoneration applications and makes a recommendation. The governor ultimately decides whether to grant an exoneration and is not bound by the parole board's recommendation.

McKinney is applying to be exonerated for a second time and recently received a letter that the parole board is considering a hearing, according to Raybin.

Expungement is a judicial process to clear a person's record of a conviction. Exoneration is an additional declaration of innocence awarded by the state.

"First what we have to do is convince the board to give him a hearing and we're going to provide documentation," Raybin said. "We want to move this along quickly. The issue is not only to get him compensation, but to do it promptly. We are now amassing evidence that would support he (should) be granted a hearing and then we can present more evidence at the actual hearing itself."

McKinney first applied for exoneration after his release, which wasn't recommended by the parole board, nor acted on by then-Gov. Phil Bredesen, according to the Tennessee Board of Parole. McKinney wasn't given a reason, he said.

State Rep. Mark Pody became involved as an advocate for McKinney at the beginning of the year and recently criticized the parole board about the process and pace of McKinney's exoneration attempt.

Pody was told a recommendation on the latest exoneration would be made around early June for Gov. Bill Haslam to consider. However, when Pody checked on the application last month he said he was told at that time information hadn't yet gone out to board members.

"Lawrence is hiring an attorney because the state is taking so long ... and I don't disagree with him," Pody said.

McKinney was found guilty in 1978 and sentenced to 100 years for rape and 10 to 15 years for burglary after being incorrectly identified.

He came to Wilson County after his release, which is where his wife, Dorothy, resided. The couple married in 2010 after becoming pen pals while McKinney was in prison. Immanuel Baptist Church Pastor John Hunn also has been an advocate for McKinney.

The Tennessee Board of Parole has not given a time frame on when it may make a recommendation, but board members have received all materials regarding McKinney's exoneration application and are in the process of reviewing those materials now, spokeswoman Melissa McDonald said.

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State Rep. Mark Pody, left, with Lawrence McKinney (Photo: File)