

SETON HALL | LAW

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An Innocence-Centered View of New Jersey's Post-Conviction Jurisprudence
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Paul Casteleiro
Director of Litigation
Centurion Ministries
Panel: 4

Paul Casteleiro is the Legal Director for Centurion Ministries (“Centurion”), the oldest exoneration nonprofit in the nation.

Mr. Casteleiro holds a B.A. from New York University and a J.D. from Rutgers Law School (Newark). He has been instrumental in freeing 30 people convicted of crimes they did not commit, and currently has pending cases in Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. Numerous national and local publications have profiled Mr. Casteleiro; in 1998 he was the lawyer in the James Landano retrial, covered in its entirety on Court TV.

Millions watched the jury’s acquittal of Landano for the murder of a police officer in Kearny, New Jersey that Mr. Landano did not commit.

In addition to winning many exonerations, Mr. Casteleiro has been a trailblazer in criminal justice reform. A leader in exposing false confessions, he obtained the first ever published opinion in New York State that admitted expert testimony on the psychology of police interrogations and false confessions. His other achievements include proposing New Jersey’s law to compensate wrongfully imprisoned people; overturning the Supreme Court of New Jersey’s law admitting hypnotically enhanced testimony in criminal trials; establishing the unreliability of the F.B.I.’s bullet lead composition analysis, which led the FBI to stop offering such testimony. Following the widespread publicity that exposed the glaring injustices present in the case of Ralph Lee, Jr. and Erik Kelley who each served 24 years for a murder they did not commit, the State of New Jersey established the first statewide Conviction Review Unit in the nation to examine inmate claims of actual innocence.

While in law school, Mr. Casteleiro clerked for civil rights attorney Morton Stavis, a co-founder of the Center for Constitutional Rights, and just after graduating, assisted Stavis in the Chicago 8 contempt trial. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Casteleiro became a public defender in Hudson County, New Jersey. In 1979, Paul launched a solo practice with a focus in criminal and appellate cases. Early in his practice, he met Jim McCloskey, founder of Centurion, who retained him to represent Centurion’s first client and exonerée, Jorge “Chiefie” De Los Santos. With that case, Mr. Casteleiro began his 40-year collaboration with Centurion.

It is clear that Paul Casteleiro is one of the best and most accomplished post-conviction attorneys in the country. His dedication to the pursuit of justice has impacted the lives of not only his clients, but their families, friends, communities, and the workings of the justice system itself.