

SETON HALL | LAW

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An Innocence-Centered View of New Jersey's Post-Conviction Jurisprudence
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Vanessa Potkin
Director of Special Litigation
The Innocence Project
Panel: 2

Ms. Potkin holds a B.A. from Columbia University and a J.D. from Columbia Law School.

Ms. Potkin joined the Innocence Project in 2000 as its first staff attorney, and has helped pioneer the model of post-conviction DNA litigation used nationwide to exonerate wrongfully convicted persons. She has represented and exonerated over 30 innocent individuals, from Louisiana to Nevada, who collectively served over 500 years of wrongful imprisonment, five of whom were originally prosecuted for capital murder.

Ms. Potkin maintains a post-conviction docket, crafting litigation strategy, writing motions, and litigating in trial and appellate courts nationwide to secure post-conviction DNA testing and to obtain relief-based DNA test results, and other exculpatory evidence in cases involving: false confessions, erroneous eyewitness identification, informant testimony, faulty forensics, prosecutorial misconduct and ineffective assistance of counsel. She has worked with a wide-range of forensic experts. She also trains and mentors other attorneys at the Innocence Project.

Ms. Potkin is a nationally recognized expert on wrongful convictions and the use of DNA to establish innocence; she is regularly consulted by attorneys, judicial and legislative committees, and media outlets. She was a member of an eight-person multidisciplinary technical working group that collaborated on a report for criminal defense attorneys published in 2012 by the National Institute of Justice to increase understanding of the science of DNA and its application in the courtroom (“DNA for the Defense Bar”).

Ms. Potkin is an adjunct professor of law at Cardozo School of Law and has co-taught the Innocence Project Legal Clinic since 2000.

In 2007, Ms. Potkin was recognized for her Outstanding Contribution to the Bar and Community by the New York State Bar Association. In 2008, she received the Thurgood Marshall Award on behalf of the New York City Bar Association. The award recognizes outstanding criminal practitioners dedicated to civil rights. In 2021, Potkin was a recipient of the Southern Justice Award, which recognized her transformative work for criminal legal reform in the South.