

March 18, 2024

Dear Chair Moller and Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

My name is Terry Olson. I am writing in support of House File 2319, which seeks to prevent police from deliberately lying to people about evidence during interrogations.

This issue hits very close to home. In 2007, I was convicted of a crime that I did not commit: the 1979 death of Jeff Hammill. Hammill was found on the side of the road and his death was initially believed to be a roadside accident. But in 2003, police decided to reopen the case.

During the 2003 investigation, police interrogated Dale Todd. Police told Todd that they had found biological evidence in his car that proved he was involved in the murder. The problem was that they did not have any evidence, and they knew that they didn't have any evidence. The police intentionally lied to Todd, and it worked. Todd was so frightened and unstable that he confessed to Hammill's murder and implicated me and another man named Ron Michaels.

At Michaels' trial, Todd admitted that he had been coerced to falsely confess and falsely implicated me and Ron Michaels. Hearing this, the jury acquitted Michaels. But I was not as lucky. Before my trial, law enforcement again coerced Todd into telling the same story he told in 2003 that implicated me in the murder. The jury believed him, and I was convicted of a murder I did not commit.

In 2012, Todd wrote to the Great North Innocence Project. He wanted to clear his conscience and tell the truth: that I was innocent. He told them that I was not involved in the death of Hammill and that he was frightened by police into making a false confession because they knowingly lied about evidence that they did not have. Ten years later, my lawyers finally helped me get out of prison with Todd's recantation.

Most people probably do not realize that innocent people confess to crimes they did not commit, but it happens, and it often happens because law enforcement knowingly uses deception. I lost ten years of my life because law enforcement deliberately and intentionally lied to Todd about the evidence they had, and he falsely confessed, implicating me in a crime that I did not commit. If this bill had been law back in 2003, I likely would not have been wrongfully convicted.

HF 2319 will protect these innocent people and prevent wrongful convictions from happening. Please vote in support of HF 2319 to protect Minnesotans like me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terry Olson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Terry Olson