

Floyd Bledsoe
Testimony on Senate Bill 125
Tuesday, February 14, 2017, 10:30 AM Room 346-S

My name is Floyd Bledsoe and I spent 16 years in prison for a crime I did not commit. I am here in support of Senate Bill 125. While no amount of money could ever make up for the time I lost, this legislation would provide the financial compensation that wrongfully convicted Kansans like me need to rebuild their lives.

I born and raised in Oskaloosa, Kansas in Jefferson County. In 2000, I was 23 and married with a two-year-old and nine-month-old son. My dream was to be a beef farmer and I was well on my way with 40 acres of land and livestock. That all changed on November 5, 1999. My wife's 14-year-old sister went missing. My brother Tom confessed to killing her. He told our church pastor that he committed the crime, turned over the murder weapon, and led detectives to her body. Then he recanted and told police that I had admitted to the crime. Despite all the evidence that Tom was the perpetrator, police decided to charge me. I was tried and convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

I always maintained my innocence. In 2014, the Paul E. Wilson Project for Innocence & Post-Conviction Remedies at Kansas University School of Law and the Midwest Innocence Project took my case and obtained DNA testing which showed that Tom was the real perpetrator. In November 2015, Tom confessed to the crime in a suicide note, and I was exonerated in December of that year.

The day that I was released from prison I had nothing but the clothing that the law school provided for me. I had no money and no place to live. Before I went to prison, my grandmother had left me land to start my own farm. The land and my livestock had to be sold. As you can imagine, this entire ordeal tore my family apart, so I could not rely on them for assistance. When I applied for jobs, employers were nervous to hire someone who had been incarcerated, despite the fact that I was innocent.

Had I actually been guilty I would have received more from the state. I would have been given \$100 upon my release from prison, job training, and mentors to help me readjust to life outside of prison. Being innocent made me ineligible for any of these benefits. The trials and my incarceration cost me thousands of dollars for legal representation, court fees and room and board. I never got any of that money back. Without the kindness of the University of Kansas Law School and some individual supporters, it would have been difficult for me to survive.

The police chose not to record Tom's confession and chose to ignore evidence that pointed to him as the culprit. When reinvestigating the case, my lawyers discovered an order signed by the prosecutor, the county sheriff and a representative of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation prior to my trial agreeing that there would not be any DNA testing conducted on the evidence. I've filed a lawsuit against the government actors who contributed to my wrongful conviction, but it will be a long process and proving official misconduct is challenging because police, prosecutors and other government actors have broad immunity.

There are so many things that I lost because of my wrongful conviction. I lost the opportunity to watch my sons grow up. I lost my property and career. I lost my freedom. Senate Bill 125 would ensure that other Kansans like me receive the financial compensation they need to get back on their feet and recover from the nightmare of a wrongful conviction. I hope you will support this bill.