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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County Commissioners to Vote on Future of DA's Conviction Integrity Unit

Unit oversees review of post-conviction DNA cases with Innocence Project of Texas

WHAT:

Dallas County Commissioners will vote on whether to continue funding the Conviction Integrity Unit at the District Attorney's (DA) Office. In conjunction with the Innocence Project of Texas (IPOT), the Conviction Integrity Unit — the first of its kind in the country — oversees the review of old DNA cases. To date, 15 wrongfully-convicted men have been cleared by DNA evidence, with 14 of those men formally exonerated for crimes they did not commit. This is the highest number of exonerations in the United States. Some of the Dallas County exonerees are expected to attend Commissioners Court tomorrow morning.

Additionally, the DA's Office has applied for a \$453,900 grant from the JEHT Foundation to provide financial support of the Conviction Integrity Unit's efforts. In order for the DA's Office to be eligible for the grant, the County Commissioners must vote to continue the Conviction Integrity Unit for two more years.

WHEN:

Tuesday, April 1, 2008
9:00 a.m. CDT

WHERE:

Dallas County Commissioners Court
Administration Office
411 Elm Street
Dallas, Texas 75202

BACKGROUND:

In April 2007, Dallas County Commissioners approved funding for a pilot program to be reviewed after one year. The pilot program included salaries for four full-time positions (division chief, prosecutor, investigator and executive secretary) for a new Conviction Integrity Unit at the DA's Office. District Attorney Craig Watkins started this unit as a result of the astounding number of exonerations Dallas County had prior to his administration. Mr. Watkins made an unprecedented move by partnering with the IPOT to review more than 400 old cases where the convicted inmate has made a claim of innocence and requested post-conviction DNA testing pursuant to Chapter 64 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure.

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