

Eyewitness Testimony: Improvements to a Basic Law Enforcement Process That Will Help Prevent Wrongful Convictions

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To date there have been 204 exonerations of persons who were convicted on eyewitness testimony alone. In the majority of these cases the only evidence presented at trial was the testimony of an eyewitness. Since the advent of DNA testing many of these eyewitness testimony convictions have been overturned, which proves that eyewitness testimony can be flawed. In 1998 Attorney General Janet Reno formed a panel to review and improve practices for gathering eyewitness testimony. For over 30 years, psychologists have conducted research in the field of eyewitness testimony. Their research has shown that human memory is fragile and should be treated carefully. Their research has also demonstrated that the lack of training of law enforcement interviewers can actually add to false identifications. Recently, the psychology research community has joined with the law enforcement community to develop some best practices that can easily be adapted into law enforcement procedures and help reduce mistaken identifications. Local State Attorney's were interviewed for input on how to best implement these new procedures. Additionally, a pilot program will be suggested for the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

Three Tampa Bay area State Attorneys were interviewed and presented the proposed changes to current lineup procedures. All of the State attorneys supported and procedure change if it could improve eyewitness reliability.