

***Charges Against George Bell, Rohan Bolt And Gary Johnson
Dismissed After Men Spent Over 24 Years In Prison Following
Wrongful Convictions***

***Hearing to be Held Tomorrow, Friday, June 4, 2021 at 9:30 a.m. ET
in Queens***

***Findings Underscore Egregious Misconduct Carried Out by Former
Queens District Attorney's Office***

NEWS PROVIDED BY Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher

Jun 03, 2021, 16:48 ET

QUEENS, N.Y., June 3, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- George Bell, Rohan Bolt and Gary Johnson, who were wrongfully convicted of a double murder in Queens and incarcerated for more than 24 years, were notified today that Queens District Attorney ("DA") Melinda Katz has agreed to drop all charges and vacate their convictions on the grounds that newly discovered evidence probably would have led to their acquittal.

Today's announcement follows a 90-day investigation into the cases by the Queens DA's Office and a previous 11-month investigation by the Queens DA's Conviction Integrity Unit ("CIU"). On March 5, 2021, Queens Supreme Court Justice Joseph A. Zayas vacated the convictions of Bell, Bolt and Johnson and released the men on their own recognizance following a joint motion to vacate the convictions made by Queens DA Katz and defense counsel for the three men. The joint motion followed the revelation that prosecutors wrongfully withheld exculpatory evidence from the Court and the defense lawyers for the three men over 24 years ago.

Commentary from Bell, Bolt and Johnson

George Bell said, "I am grateful that justice has finally prevailed after 24 years. I thank everyone that believed in my innocence and fought vigorously for me. I am committed to fighting for others who have been wrongfully convicted so that they may see freedom and justice as well."

Rohan Bolt said, "I have maintained my innocence for the past 24 years. I will never get that time back, but I will make the most of every day I have now. This miscarriage of justice is far too common, and the decision today hopefully sheds hope for others who have been wrongfully convicted."

Gary Johnson said, "After spending more than two decades in prison for a crime I did not commit, I finally receive some sense of closure today. The burden that has been sitting on my shoulders for the past 24 years has been lifted and I am excited to be able to start my life again."

Commentary from Defense Attorneys for Bell, Bolt and Johnson

Rita Dave Esq., attorney for Bolt and Johnson, said, "Gary, Rohan and George deserve the justice they are getting today. They get to walk out of the courthouse that took away their liberty and took them away from their families for 24 years, for a crime they did not commit. We would not be here today but for the extraordinary work of DA Katz, Conviction Integrity Unit head Bryce Benjet and Executive ADA Pishoy Yacoub. Their commitment to seeking justice and their willingness to painstakingly review the files, conduct a new investigation and work closely with defense counsel led to these three men's freedom."

Marc Wolinsky, Partner at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz and attorney for Bell, said, "In the history of New York State, this is one of the most abusive violations of constitutional rights that I can imagine has ever taken place. It is only through a miracle that the evidence proving the innocence of these three men came to light. Queens DA Katz, her Conviction Integrity Unit head Bryce Benjet and Executive ADA Pishoy deserve huge credit for righting the terrible wrong once this evidence was brought to their attention."

Scott Stevenson, Senior Vice President at Aon plc and attorney for Bell, said, "Today, George, Rohan, and Gary finally receive the justice they deserve, and regain lives they have been fighting for over the past 24 years. Though we are happy with today's result, it does not erase their pain. There is an undeniable pattern of misconduct by prosecutors in the previous Queens DA's office and justice will not prevail until all of the wrongfully convicted walk free."

David Crow Esq., Associate Appellate Counsel at Legal Aid Society and attorney for Bell, said, "Unfortunately, this case is not unique. It is critical that we recognize and understand the civic consequences of wrongful conviction and work to rectify the harm that has already been done to so many individuals like George, Gary and Rohan. The consequences of a broken criminal justice system extend well beyond those directly touched."

Background

Bell, Bolt and Johnson's wrongful convictions resulted from egregious prosecutorial misconduct by the former Queens District Attorney's Office, coercive and violent interrogations by the NYPD and political pressure by then New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Queens Assistant District Attorneys Charles Testagrossa and Brad Leventhal wrongfully withheld exculpatory evidence specifically requested by the defense that established that the Speedstick gang, a gang that the NYPD and prosecutors knew were on a crime spree in Queens at the time, was involved in the crime that Bell, Bolt and Johnson were charged with. The former Queens DA's office also failed to disclose medical records that demonstrated that a key witness was suffering hallucinations and accepted knowingly perjured testimony at trial, among other misconduct.

Bell and Johnson were 19 and 22 years old at the time of their arrests. They had never met Bolt, a 34-year-old married father of four and restaurant owner. None of the men had criminal histories and no physical evidence connected any of them to the crime at the time of their arrests or at any time since. For the last 24 years, Bell, Bolt and Johnson have maintained their innocence.

GoFundMe Supporting Bell, Bolt and Johnson's Reentry into Society

Representatives for Bell, Bolt and Johnson have set up a fund to help support Bell, Bolt and Johnson in their reintroduction to society. More information about the fund and how to make a donation can be found at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/exoneration-george-bell-rohan-bolt-gary-johnson>.

Gary Johnson and Rohan Bolt are represented by Rita Dave, Esq. George Bell is represented by Marc Wolinsky, Anna Schwarz and Amanda Lee of Wachtell, Lipton Rosen & Katz; Scott Stevenson, Esq. of Aon plc; and David Crow, The Legal Aid Society. The investigators working on the case were Luke Brindle-Khym and Charles Linehan of QRI (Quest Research and Investigations) and Kevin Hinkson.

###