



Woodland man plans to sue state over wrongful conviction, imprisonment



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Woodland's Alan Northrop is one of fewer than a dozen people who are eligible to seek compensation for wrongful conviction and imprisonment under a state law that took effect Sunday.

"It's not a lot of people who are going to qualify retroactively," said Jackie McMurtrie, director of the Innocence Project Northwest in Seattle.

Northrop, 49, spent 17 years in prison for rape before DNA evidence exonerated him and a Clark County judge vacated his conviction in 2010.

He said earlier this week that he plans to file a claim in Clark County Superior Court for compensation but hasn't yet done so.

Under the law -- enacted through House Bill 1341, Northrop is eligible to receive \$50,000 for each year of his imprisonment plus payment of his child support debt. The state reduced his child support debt from more than \$111,000 to \$53,000 after his exoneration, Northrop said. He testified repeatedly in favor of the bill.

"It's a major accomplishment," Northrop said of the new law. "It's cool, but then again, it's frustrating because it took so long."

About a dozen people in the state have been wrongfully convicted, imprisoned and then exonerated, but a few of them have already received settlements from the state, McMurtrie said. A settlement would disqualify them from seeking additional compensation under the new law.

Northrop was accused of attacking a housekeeper on Jan. 11, 1993, while she was cleaning a La Center home because he resembled a composite sketch. The victim didn't recognize him in a photo montage but later identified him in a live lineup, where he was the only familiar face. Larry Davis, a co-defendant in the case, also was convicted of the rape. DNA evidence examined years later cast doubt on their convictions.

Since Northrop was exonerated, he said he's been working to rebuild his life. He works at Sunlight Supply Inc. and is reconnecting with his three children. The new bill provides his children with free tuition at state universities until age 26.

He's also getting married soon to fiancée Shawna Smith.

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