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Wrongfully Incarcerated for 26 Years, George Toca Denied Relief Despite Murder Victim's Family Members Pleas on His Behalf

New Orleans – Jeanetta Batiste and Joyce Dolliole, the mother and aunt of Eric Batiste, who was killed in a 1984 shooting, pleaded today before Orleans Parish Criminal District Court Judge Julian Parker for the release of George Toca, who was wrongfully convicted of murdering his best friend, Mr. Batiste, in 1985. Both women, speaking in court for the first time, stated that they have always been convinced that Mr. Toca is innocent and have been telling the Orleans Parish district attorney so for years. Both women testified that they will never have closure as long as the wrong man is in prison for their son and nephew's tragic death.

At today's hearing, Mr. Toca's attorneys from Innocence Project New Orleans (IPNO) and co-counsel Judge Calvin Johnson (retired) presented eight witnesses and hundreds of pages of evidence to the court, all gathered since IPNO took Mr. Toca's case in 2002. Former Chief Justice Pascal F. Calogero, Jr. was in court to represent Ms. Batiste and Ms. Dolliole.

Sadly, Judge Parker denied Mr. Toca's appeal. "In all of my years as a lawyer and as a judge I have never seen a case like this," remarked Mr. Toca's co-counsel, Judge Calvin Johnson. "The fact that Mr. Batiste's family believes Mr. Toca is innocent, and the evidence that continues to pile up implicating another shooter, needs to be taken seriously. I am sorry Judge Parker chose not to do so."

Mr. Toca, who was 17 at the time of his arrest, was wrongfully convicted based on misidentifications by two eyewitnesses. The witnesses described the shooter as taller and weighing more than Mr. Batiste, who was 5'6" and weighed 125 pounds. Mr. Toca was 5'5" and weighed less than 125 pounds. Mr. Toca also had four oversized gold teeth, which the witnesses did not mention in their descriptions of the killer. Edison Learson, who was 5'10" and weighed between 135-140 pounds fit the eyewitnesses' descriptions and today was identified by multiple witnesses, including several of his friends, as the real shooter based on confessions he made to them.

"This injustice has weighed heavily on this community for over 25 years. Mr. Batiste's family deserves the closure they seek and IPNO will keep fighting until that happens," explained Emily Maw, IPNO director. "The facts of this case clearly show that Mr. Toca did not do this crime."

IPNO will file writ to the 4th Circuit Court of Appeal.

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Innocence Project New Orleans (IPNO) represents innocent prisoners serving life sentences in Louisiana and Mississippi and assists them with their transition into the free world upon their release. IPNO works in the states with the country's highest incarceration rates and the highest rates of wrongful conviction. Since its inception, IPNO has achieved the release of 15 wrongfully convicted prisoners. For more information visit www.ip-no.org.