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# Newsroom: Wrongful Conviction: The Fernando Bermudez Story

Roger Williams University School of Law

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# ***Newsroom***

## **Wrongful Conviction: The Fernando Bermudez Story**

RWU Law presents an extraordinary event: a man who spent 18 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit, the lawyer who won his freedom, and more...

Fernando Bermudez was robbed of half his life, spending 18 years in prison – from age 22 to 40 – for a murder he didn't commit.

He was finally freed in November 2009, when his conviction – for killing a teenager outside a New York City nightclub – was thrown out by New York State Supreme Court Justice John Cataldo. In a scathing 79-page decision, Cataldo ruled that Bermudez's rights had been violated due to grievous police and prosecutorial misconduct.

"It's been a very long, bitter struggle in which at times I lost hope and even questioned my own existence as a person," says Bermudez, now 41. "What happened to me should not happen to anyone."

**The Bermudez case will anchor a very special presentation titled, "Wrongful Conviction: Is It Constitutional to Incarcerate an 'Actually Innocent' Person?", to be held at Roger Williams University School of Law on Tuesday, March 29, 2011. Appearing on the panel:**



- **Fernando Bermudez** will talk about his harrowing experiences and two-decade quest to clear his name.



- **Barry Pollack**, a defense attorney with the Washington, D.C., law firm Miller & Chevalier, led Fernando Bermudez's pro bono defense team. In 2007, Pollack represented another Innocence Project client, Martin Tankleff, winning a reversal of his double-murder conviction and dismissal of all charges against him after Tankleff spent 17 years in prison. Pollack will discuss the law relating to "actual innocence."



- **Betty Anne Waters '98** was a single mom with a high-school equivalency when she set out to free her brother Kenneth Waters, sentenced to life in prison for a murder he didn't commit. Eighteen years later, with an RWU Law degree and help from the Innocence Project, she succeeded. Her quest was the subject of the 2010 motion picture, "Conviction", starring Hilary Swank. Waters will introduce Bermudez.



- **Alba Morales** is an Innocence Project staff attorney who litigates post-conviction DNA cases throughout the country and supervises students through the Innocence Project clinic at Cardozo School of Law. Morales will offer an overview of wrongful convictions with a focus on eyewitness identification.

**ALSO ON THE PANEL:**

- **Gerald Coyne**, Rhode Island Deputy Attorney General, and **John Hardiman**, Rhode Island Public Defender, on the work of the Rhode Island Task Force on Eyewitness Identification.

The presentation will run from **3:00-6:00 p.m. School of Law, in the Appellate Courtroom, Room 283**, at Roger Williams University School of Law. Three (3) R.I. MCLE credits will be awarded. **This event is free and open to media and the public.** Please RSVP to the Office of Alumni, Programs & Events at (401) 254-4659 or [lawevents@rwu.edu](mailto:lawevents@rwu.edu). Co-sponsored by the RWU Criminal Law Society.