



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**NYUJ LAUNCHES HALF-MILLION-DOLLAR CAMPAIGN TO FIX  
NEW YORK'S BROKEN DISCOVERY LAWS**

*Coalition to Blanket Long Island, Hudson Valley, Capital Region, NYC with \$500,000 in [Ads](#)*

*As Opposition Mobilizes, NY, TX Victims of Wrongful Conviction & Texan Safety  
Authorities Convene to Show Discovery Reform Is Necessary to Public Safety and Fairness  
in New York*

**NEW YORK** – In the face of mobilizing opposition to criminal justice reform, New Yorkers United for Justice (NYUJ) today brought together the New York and Texas criminal justice community and public safety authorities, including victims of wrongful conviction, to launch a comprehensive \$500,000 ad campaign to fix New York's discovery laws that allow prosecutors to withhold vital evidence at the expense of innocent victims and public safety. NYUJ, led by formerly incarcerated New Yorkers Khalil A. Cumberbatch and Topeka K. Sam, is launching a series of groundbreaking television and digital ads on Long Island, the Hudson Valley, the Capital Region and New York City featuring Michael Morton, a Texas man wrongfully convicted of his wife's murder and incarcerated for 25 years thanks to withheld evidence - while her true assailant went free and killed again.

As Governor Cuomo and the New York State legislature have indicated strong support for criminal justice reform, powerful special interests, including the advocacy arm of the District Attorneys (DAASNY), seek to block reform, making Long Island and other suburban localities the center of their stand. New Yorkers United for Justice, a statewide coalition, is focused on educating the public in these communities to ensure all New Yorkers understand how criminal justice reform, including discovery, is crucial to community safety and justice. Mr. Morton was joined by Dewey Bozella—a New Yorker wrongfully convicted in 1983 who served 26 years in prison before his conviction was overturned in 2009; as well as safety authorities Judge Beckie Palomo of the 341<sup>st</sup> District of Texas; and Linda Garza, Assistant District Attorney for Webb County, Texas.

“The goal of criminal justice reform is not just to make New York more just, but to make it safer,” said **Khalil A. Cumberbatch, chief strategist, New Yorkers United for Justice**. “Too often

opponents will say you can have reform, or you can have public safety, but you cannot have both. This is a false narrative. We know from experience that New York's criminal justice system wastes law enforcement resources and taxpayer dollars entrapping vulnerable New Yorkers in a cycle of incarceration that endangers our citizens and harms our families. Criminal justice reform starts with discovery. I thank our advocates from Texas for joining us in this campaign and as sharing their model for reform in the Empire State."

**Michael Morton** said, "As a result of Texas' broken discovery laws, prosecutors were able to withhold vital information from my defense lawyers, including testimony from my son that he saw the "monster" that killed my wife. As a result, I was wrongfully convicted for the murder of my wife. I spent 25 years of my life in prison for a crime I did not commit while my wife's assailant was free to murder a second woman. When my conviction was overturned, I dedicated my life to ensuring what happened to me would never be repeated. I am living proof that reform is no impediment to public safety, but a guarantee of it. I'm thrilled to work with NYUJ to bring discovery reform to New York and make the Empire State a safer and more just place."

**Dewey Bozella** said, "In 1977, 92-year-old Emma Crapser was murdered in her [Poughkeepsie, New York](#) apartment and police claimed Crapser walked in on a burglary I was committing and that I killed her. Once convicted, I learned that key information was not disclosed to my defense, including pages of police reports containing statements from neighbors that contradicted the testimony of the prosecution's key witnesses. Discovery rules requiring earlier disclosure would have enabled my defense to find these witnesses and call them at trial, and I wouldn't have lost more than a quarter century of my life. It is time for New York to get it right. No one should ever have to go through what I went through. I am a living example of how poor discovery can spell a dead end for justice and why lawmakers in Albany must pass discovery reform this session."

New York's criminal justice system, particular its discovery laws, remain mired in the past. Known as the "blindfold law," New York's discovery rules empower prosecutors to withhold critical evidence from the defense until the day of the trial, [causing New York to have one of the highest rates of wrongful convictions in the country](#).

"When New York's jails are teeming with the non-convicted, we have to examine the many ways our current justice system is failing," said **Topeka K. Sam, senior advisor, New Yorkers United for Justice**. "The state's discovery system brings far too many variables that prolong jail time and waste money and resources as those who are charged wait, and wait, and wait behind bars. New Yorkers deserve access to all evidence, to speed up trials and better ensure the right person ends up behind bars."

**Judge Beckie Palomo** said, "I am the Judge of Texas's 341<sup>st</sup> District Court, serving Laredo, Texas. As New York debates discovery reform, I offer a perspective from 19 years as a jurist and former state prosecutor to the issue. I know from firsthand experience, in the reach for the most fair and efficient administration of justice, that open and transparent discovery promotes

the interests of the criminal justice community, from the prosecutors and police to the accused. Discovery reform expedites the final resolution of criminal cases, reduces the risk of wrongful convictions, preserves constitutional protections and reduces cost to taxpayers. Collective efforts between law enforcement, legislators, and the communities will make our communities safer.”

**Assistant District Attorney Linda Garza, Webb County, Texas**, said, “Prior to discovery reform, Texas prosecutors were saddled with the ‘gatekeeping’ responsibility of deciding what evidence should be turned over to the accused. But under the Michael Morton Act, we’ve been relieved of this ethical dilemma without any increased security concern for witnesses or victims. Every day, open discovery helps restore Texans’ faith in our criminal justice system and we know it’s something New Yorkers can accomplish here.”

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