

Firm News | July 1, 2025

# Troutman Pepper Locke Helps Obtain Release of Pro Bono Client After 27 Years

## RELATED PROFESSIONALS

[Matthew E. Orso](#) | [Heryka R. Knoespel](#) | [Edward M. Nogay](#)

## RELATED OFFICES

[Charlotte](#)

---

Troutman Pepper Locke recently partnered with the Duke University School of Law Wrongful Convictions Clinic to obtain a significant pro bono achievement for its client Benjamin Cole. Mr. Cole had been convicted of a 1998 murder in Greensboro, North Carolina. However, Mr. Cole had always maintained his innocence, and evidence demonstrated that he was in Dayton, Ohio, at the time of the murder. Although no physical evidence tied Mr. Cole to the crime, he was tried capitally and eventually sentenced to life in prison in 1999.

The Troutman-Duke team put on Mr. Cole's case at a multi-day evidentiary hearing in May in Guilford County Superior Court in North Carolina. This hearing was the culmination of years of work by the Duke Clinic under supervising attorney and clinical professor of law Jamie Lau. The team investigated the matter and filed multiple post-conviction motions for relief. At the hearing, the Troutman-Duke team submitted evidence that their client was wrongfully convicted due to misidentification and several constitutional violations involving the state's withholding of exculpatory evidence at trial.

In light of the strong case put on at the evidentiary hearing, the state offered, and Mr. Cole entered, an *Alford* plea that allows him to maintain his innocence and plead guilty to a lesser charge. This allowed Mr. Cole to be resentenced to "time served" and enabled his immediate release. After 27 years of imprisonment, Mr. Cole has now reunited with his mother, sister, and other family in Georgia. For more details on the procedural history and evidence in this matter, see the [press release](#) from Duke Law's Wrongful Convictions Clinic.

Duke Law's Wrongful Convictions Clinic investigates plausible claims of innocence made by people incarcerated for felonies in North Carolina and has helped secure more than a dozen prison releases since its founding in 2008.

Troutman Pepper Locke's legal team consisted of Matthew Orso, [Heryka Knoespel](#), and [Eddie Nogay](#).

Each year, Troutman Pepper Locke attorneys dedicate thousands of pro bono hours in support of nonprofits, military veterans, children, the wrongfully convicted, civil rights and social justice initiatives, and so many other causes. Learn more at [troutman.com/pro-bono](https://troutman.com/pro-bono).

## Troutman Pepper Locke

Troutman Pepper Locke helps clients solve complex legal challenges and achieve their business goals in an ever-

changing global economy. With more than 1,600 attorneys in 30+ offices, the firm serves clients in all major industry sectors, with particular depth in energy, financial services, health care and life sciences, insurance and reinsurance, private equity, and real estate. Learn more at [troutman.com](https://troutman.com).

## **RELATED INDUSTRIES + PRACTICES**

- [Litigation + Trial](#)