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Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

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Innocence Project Clinic Client Exonerated After 35 Years



Rafael Ruiz's legal team included Cardozo Innocence Project Clinic students Sasha Rubman (far left) and Matt Christiana (second from right), along with Innocence Project founder Barry Scheck (far right).

Cardozo's Innocence Project Clinic celebrated a victory as Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Stephen Antignani overturned the rape charges of Rafael Ruiz, a Bronx man who had been imprisoned for 35 years.

The Innocence Project team, which included Cardozo students Sasha Rubman and Matt Christiana, pushed for the testing of the victim's sexual assault kit, which contributed to Ruiz's exoneration.

Innocence Project Co-Founder and Cardozo Professor **Barry Scheck** said cases such as Ruiz's come up often as incarcerated people are pressured to take deals.

“When you're offered these kinds of plea bargains, it's almost a rational thing to plead guilty even though you didn't commit the crime,” Scheck told the Daily News. “And so that's one of the issues, not just in the state of New York but across the country and in the federal system, that people have to look at... There shouldn't be that kind of trial penalty just because you insist on your innocence.”