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# Jefferson City Post-Tribune

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## Drug convictions thrown out, inmates freed over tainted testimony by undercover cop

*'Our investigation, thus far, has clearly shown this conduct is isolated to one individual within local law enforcement.'*  
Prosecutor Bill Tackett

**By STEPHEN FOUTES  
News Tribune**

Two men convicted on drug charges in Cole County were released from prison Wednesday after prosecutors learned testimony in their cases may have been tainted by an undercover officer.

A third man's conviction on a drug charge also has been set aside, but he remains imprisoned on an unrelated charge.

According to court papers filed Wednesday, prosecutors filed a

motion to set aside the convictions because "new evidence indicates the testimony of the state's key witness is no longer credible."

Documents filed when the defendants were charged show a Cole County Sheriff's Department deputy was a witness in each case.

However, Cole County Prosecutor Bill Tackett did not identify the officer, or confirm the agency the officer was affiliated with, because formal charges have not been filed.

According to Tackett, his office

began investigating the officer after "irregularities" in the officer's testimony were discovered at a recent trial.

As a result of the investigation, the three convictions were set aside. Juries convicted two of the men following trials that included the officer's testimony.

Tackett identified the men as DeAndre Webster, 23, Quentin Williams, 26, and Randall Robi- nette, 38.

According to court records,

Webster was charged Sept. 17, 2001, for selling marijuana. He reportedly pleaded guilty to that crime on Dec. 3, 2001, and subsequently was placed on probation.

But on Nov. 20, 2002, a new marijuana sales charge was filed against Webster. That charge constituted a violation of his probation, and on April 7 he was ordered to serve three years in prison. Both cases involved the officer being

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## ☆ Tainted

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investigated.

Williams was charged Feb. 26, 2002, for distribution of marijuana, court records show. A jury convicted Williams on that charge on May 7, 2002, and he was sentenced to five years in prison.

Robinette also was charged for selling marijuana on Feb. 26, 2002. He was convicted by a jury during a trial on Sept. 5, 2002, and on Dec. 23, 2002, he received a seven-year prison term.

Webster and Williams were released from prison Wednesday, while Robinette still is serving time for a stealing charge.

The men were discharged by an order from Circuit Judge Thomas Brown III.

"This investigation unearthed disturbing revelations to say the least," Tackett said Thursday. "Our investigation, thus far, has clearly shown this conduct is isolated to one individual within local law enforcement."

The investigation is being conducted by the prosecutor's office and likely will go before a grand jury.

"Grand juries become critical in these types of investigations

because they afford a prosecutor additional investigatory tools," Tackett said.

Tackett also said the prosecutor's office has been working to identify other affected defendants and to end their incarceration/discharge them from probation.

The prosecutor's office also is building a criminal case against the officer, Tackett said, while taking steps to ensure the officer is never again able to work in law enforcement.

"As prosecutors, we have a continuing ethical obligation to see that justice is done," Tackett said. "That ethical obligation does not end when you walk out of a courtroom after a verdict has been rendered by a jury, or a plea of guilty has been accepted."