

The Identification of Criminals by Eyewitnesses



“That’s the guy, I think.”

For years, scientists and criminal justice practitioners have known that some eyewitnesses struggle to recognize the face of the stranger they saw for only a few moments. Worse, some believe they recognize him, but are wrong. Today, we know that about 75% of people exonerated by DNA were sent to prison, at least in part, based on a mistaken identification by an eyewitness. Over the past decade, the National Institute for Justice, the Innocence Project and the International Association of Chiefs of Police have called on police departments to modify the procedures they use with eyewitnesses. And now, a report by a committee at the National Academy of Sciences has echoed that call.

William G. Brooks, a Massachusetts police chief and recognized expert on eyewitness identification, will talk about the science behind the reforms, and about ways that police are implementing them across the U.S. Among other topics, his presentation will include:

- Cautions for dispatchers
- Interview techniques
- Instructing witnesses
- Handling multiple witness cases
- Assembling a photo array
- Sequential photo arrays
- Blind administration
- Assessing witness confidence
- Sketches and composites

William G. Brooks is the Chief of the Norwood, Massachusetts Police Department. He was a member of the Supreme Judicial Court’s Study Committee on Eyewitness Identification and is a member of the SJC standing committee. He also served on a committee at the National Academy of Sciences that issued a report on eyewitness identification research. He presents nationally on behalf of the Innocence Project and was the 2012 recipient of the Innocence Network’s Champion of Justice Award. Chief Brooks is a graduate of the FBI National Academy.