

# JAILED BY MISTAKE

Wrongful arrests mount as fingerprint results are ignored.

## Months behind bars

Sampling of St. Louis cases reveals 100 people were arrested and wrongfully held for a total of more than 2,000 days.

## Preventable errors

Most cases could have been avoided or fixed immediately had authorities paid attention to fingerprints.

## 'I don't worry about this'

Officials in St. Louis initially expressed concern and pledged reforms, but now play down significance of the problem.

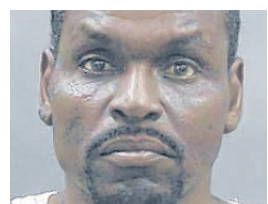
## Personal stories

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### ANTONIO ARNOLD

was arrested at least twice for cases that belong to his brother, Leonard Arnold, and spent 211 days in jail.



### OLIVER C. JOHNSON

was twice arrested and spent 22 days in jail on charges intended for Oliver Matthew Johnson.



### WILLIAM E. WILLIS,

who has 10 fingers, was repeatedly arrested in a case against William L. Willis, who has only eight.

## How the wrong person might get arrested

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CHRISTIAN GOODEN • cgooden@post-dispatch.com

Shannon Jolliff checks herself in a mirror after getting false eyelashes recently at Nu Fashion in St. Louis. As Shannon Renee McNeal, she was mistakenly arrested in 2009, costing her a job and thousands of dollars. "I have to pamper myself (because) I've been through so much," she explained.

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**ST. LOUIS** • Shannon Renee McNeal was torn from her screaming children by police who were seeking a woman with a similar name — a woman who they should have known had been murdered seven months before.

A clerical mistake set up the arrest, sloppy attention to fingerprints put her behind bars, and months of indifference to the error cost McNeal her home, \$15,000 and, for a while, her job driving a Metro bus.

Yet she may be luckier than scores of others who have been wrongfully arrested and spent weeks, even months, trapped behind bars in a broken St. Louis city justice system.

The Post-Dispatch has identified 100 people arrested in error over the past seven years. Collectively, they spent more than 2,000 days in jail — an average of about three weeks each. One man alone was incarcerated 211 days. About a quarter were held repeatedly — one of them, five times — and 15 were locked up while the right suspect was already behind bars.

Almost all the mistakes could have been prevented — or at least fixed immediately — had authorities paid attention to what fingerprints tried to tell them from the start.

Officials' reaction to McNeal: It was her own fault, because if her name had not been in a criminal justice database, the mistake could not have been made.

Confronted 21 months ago by reporters with examples of several wrongful arrests, Jennifer Joyce, the circuit

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## Water fluoridation issue resurfaces, this time in St. Peters

City advisory committee is considering recommendation to stop adding fluoride to wells.

BY MARK SCHLINKMANN

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**ST. PETERS** • A decades-old nationwide debate over fluoridating drinking water to prevent tooth decay has resurfaced in St. Peters.

A city advisory committee on health and wellness is consider-

ing recommending that St. Peters stop adding fluoride to water produced by the city's wells. If it does, the issue would then go before the Board of Aldermen.

Barry Pulley, a committee member affiliated with a national anti-fluoride group, worries that long-term exposure to fluoride could lead to various health problems.

"Whether it's good for your teeth or not, bad for my body or not, it should be my choice," Pulley said. "Forced mass medication is just wrong."

Dental organizations remain strongly committed to fluoridation. So is the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That agency calls fluoridation one of the 10 great public

health achievements of the 20th century because of the dramatic decline in tooth decay since the practice began in the 1940s.

"We are definitely in favor, because it works," said Dr. Jeff Dallen, a Creve Coeur dentist and a spokesman for the Greater St. Louis Dental Society. "It's got decades of research to back it up."

The federal agency says sci-

entific studies show that exposure at levels used in community water fluoridation is safe and doesn't cause adverse health effects or systemic disorders.

Critics with the Fluoride Action Network, with which Pulley acts as Missouri liaison, cite other research they say indicates

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