



Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

P. O. Box 21373, York, PA 17402

Phone: 717-236-4840

Email: info@padp.org website: www.padp.org

Twitter @padp_org

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Contact: Kathleen Lucas at KLucas@padp.org or 717-236-4840

US SUPREME COURT RULING in WILLIAMS v PENNSYLVANIA

(York PA) This morning, the United States Supreme Court issued its ruling in the case of Terrance Williams v Pennsylvania. The Court concluded that when former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald Castille insisted in ruling in a case in which he had made the decision to seek the death penalty against Terrance Williams that the likelihood of bias “is too high to be constitutionally tolerable.”

We welcome this morning’s ruling but recognize that it is also a cautionary tale. When the state seeks to kill one of its own citizens, there must be no room for error. Our system of justice is, and always will be, fallible. Given the myriad of problems – the well-established racial disparity, the link between class and ineffective assistance of counsel, prosecutorial misconduct and the harm that the system causes families -- this decision is just the latest proof that it is time to put an end to capital punishment in Pennsylvania. In fact, the victim’s widow in this case has fought against Williams’ execution.

The following quote can be attributed to Kathleen Lucas, Executive Director of Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty:

“This ruling is yet another example of why it is simply ridiculous to assume that we can trust such a fallible system to make life and death decisions. Time and time again, we are confronted with the overwhelming evidence that the system of capital punishment is broken beyond repair. We need to stop pretending that it is not. We must abolish the death penalty.”

The following quote can be attributed to Dr. Spero Lappas, lecturer and criminal defense attorney with extensive experience in capital cases:

“It is an ancient rule of law that judges must exercise their great power without bias or prejudice if they expect to earn the respect of the public they serve. Today, a solid majority of the United States Supreme Court reinforced the principle that our Constitution requires fairness, impartiality, and the highest standards of due process from the judicial officers to whom we entrust the lives and freedom of our fellow citizens. To put the matter simply, judges must never appear to be taking sides in any case -- and above all they must never appear to be taking their own side.”

To speak with Kathleen Lucas or Dr. Lappas, contact Kathleen Lucas at KLucas@padp.org or 717-236-4840

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