



Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

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The Honorable Ron Marsico
Room 315J Main Capitol
PO Box 202105
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Joseph A. Petrarca
220 Irvis Office Building
PO Box 202055
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Marsico and Chairman Petrarca,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the House Judiciary Committee on the crucial decision to pause executions while the bipartisan study commission completes its work. As you have heard, this is an area where reasonable people can and do disagree. Not all victims feel the same way about how the death penalty impacts their healing process or whether it provides justice for their loved ones. Not all members of law enforcement feel the same way. Not all prosecutors and juries believe the same thing.

Under Pennsylvania law, a reasonable doubt is doubt that would cause a person of ordinary sensibility to hesitate or pause before acting in a matter of great concern. There is no matter of greater concern than the state taking the life of one of its citizens. And when you look closely at the problems with Pennsylvania's death penalty, they should certainly give you pause.

- In the 35 year history of Pennsylvania's death penalty, when 400 people have been sentenced to death and more than 250 of those sentences have been reversed, when the single most likely outcome of a public policy is that it is overturned, that should give you pause.

national number of death row exonerations to a stunning total of 154. And six of them happened right here in Pennsylvania.

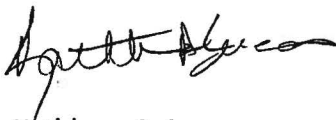
Regardless of our individual opinions on the death penalty itself, we all agree that we want our criminal justice system to treat everyone equally regardless of race, geography, socioeconomic status and other factors. In short, we want it to be fair. Numerous studies have demonstrated that our current system is anything but. Pennsylvanians care about fairness.

This is not about Hubert Michael and Terry Williams, their heinous crimes or about the loved ones of their victims. This is about a deeply flawed system that has the very real potential to take innocent lives.

I urge you, the people we have elected and entrusted with protecting the public good, to exercise that responsibility by making decisions based on facts, not opinions. The results of the study on capital punishment will provide important additional data. We must not continue to follow the path that we know has resulted in so many mistakes. Rather, we must err on the side of caution.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kathleen A. Lucas

Executive Director