

Testimony of David Scott

As a retired Deputy Chief of the SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) Police Department, I personally oppose capital punishment. The SEPTA Police Department is the 5th largest police department in Pennsylvania.

It's prudent and makes common sense that Governor Wolf issued a temporary reprieve for Hubert L. Michael until he has received and reviewed the forthcoming bi-partisan report of the Pennsylvania Task Force and Advisory Committee on Capital Punishment. It's also prudent and logical that Governor Wolf announced a pause in executions.

Heinous crimes must be punished severely and of course I have great sympathy for the families of victims.

However, many police officials believe capital punishment is the least effective way to control crime. Capital punishment is not a deterrent to murder.

A poll, commissioned by the Death Penalty Information Center surveyed a national sample of 500 randomly selected U.S. police chiefs on questions regarding the death penalty and reducing violent crime in 2009. The findings are in a report entitled Smart on Crime: Reconsidering the Death Penalty in a Time of Economic Crisis. In summary:

- The chiefs ranked the death penalty last in their priorities for effective crime reduction.
- The officers did not believe the death penalty acts as a deterrent to murder.
- They rated it as one of most inefficient uses of taxpayer dollars in fighting crime.
- Many criminologists concur that the death penalty does not effectively reduce the number of murders.

Furthermore, in some States that continue to use capital punishment, crime has gone up. Capital punishment is also "cruel and unusual" as well as inhumane. There are many instances where there have been "botched executions".

Capital punishment is also selective and racist. People of color who are charged with killing whites are far more likely to be sentenced to death. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System concluded, our state is "second only to Louisiana in the percentage of African Americans on death row" and "one third of the African American death row inmates in Philadelphia County would have received sentences of life imprisonment if they had not been African American."

"Equal Protection" is not guaranteed by use of capital punishment. Defendants should have appropriate counsel at every stage of their prosecution. Pennsylvania has a history of paying lawyers to represent poor people facing the death penalty at some of the lowest rates in the United States. Death sentences are imposed on poor people who had a poorly paid, ill equipped attorney. Capital punishment must be applied fairly and proportionately if used at all.

We must eliminate the risk of executing an innocent person. The vast majority of death sentences imposed in Pennsylvania have later been reversed on appeal due to errors or misconduct that occurred during trials. Capital punishment is irrevocable and must be abolished in the Commonwealth.

David, can you tell some personal stories? Examples of families of murder victims that oppose the death penalty? Or what your personal experience has taught you? Can you talk about the lengthy appeals process, the toll that it takes on the victims' loved ones yet is absolutely necessary so we do not execute an innocent person? Personal stories are compelling and that's what will be remembered later and covered (hopefully) by the media.

In fact, the way it's been rigged, the whole thing is targeted to play to the media. The DP supporters will tell stories about fallen officers, victims' families pain, etc. We need to counter that argument with the other side and make our own narrative.

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