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Senate of Pennsylvania

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MAJORITY POLICY

February 20, 2015

Seth Williams
District Attorney
Philadelphia County
3 South Penn Square
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107

Dear Mr. Williams:

I read with great interest the petition you submitted to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court regarding Governor Wolf's unilateral decision to impose a moratorium on the death penalty in our Commonwealth.

To be clear, I wholeheartedly agree with your position and wish to convey my appreciation for your respect of the rule of law and the Constitution of Pennsylvania. Most importantly, I would like to applaud your advocacy for the victims of the horrendous crimes that those on death row were dutifully convicted of perpetrating.

Far too often, elected officials lose sight of the reality of their decisions and the message those decisions send.

In this instance, Governor Wolf has set aside the will of the people of Pennsylvania, the necessity for final justice to be served for the victims associated with capital cases and the primacy of our Constitution in both granting and limiting the powers of the executive. I offer that observation without respect to political party considerations.

Your actions today, and recently, are truly the "fresh start."

Your willingness to take on the political corruption cases of several lawmakers and judges that were brushed aside by our current Attorney General, and the petition you filed before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court involving the Governor's unilateral moratorium (being disguised as an interminable reprieve) on the death penalty, give me hope that there remain strong leaders willing to set aside political considerations in favor of the people of Pennsylvania and the rule of law.

As an elected lawmaker from Lancaster County, I have worked hard to promote honest, open, transparent government that seeks to serve its citizens, protect the innocent, appropriately punish the guilty and manage within the confines of constrained resources.

To be sure, it is not an easy job, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge those who were seeking the same goals.

In the end, issues like the death penalty deserve an open debate, a strict adherence to the law and a willingness to consider those who suffer from crime - the victims. Like Philadelphia, Lancaster County has experienced some truly heinous acts of violence, like the recent brutal rape and murder of a young schoolteacher.

While there may be disagreement about the appropriateness of capital punishment, I agree with you that the action taken by Governor Wolf was not within his constitutional authority and it usurped judicial review of criminal judgments. As a constitutional republic, we cannot survive if the rule of law is not followed – especially when it is broken in favor of convicted criminals on death row.

On behalf of victims of crime, the rule of law and our Constitution, I pray the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will agree.

Thank you again for your service.

Sincerely,



RYAN P. AUMENT
State Senator
36th Senatorial District

cc: Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association
Craig Stedman, District Attorney of Lancaster County
Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police
Governor Tom Wolf