

For Immediate Release: January 5, 2012

Contacts: Laura Burstein at 202-626-6868 or [laura.burstein@ssd.com](mailto:laura.burstein@ssd.com)

## **More than Two Dozen Former Judges and Prosecutors, 73 Faith Leaders, and Numerous Mental Health and Legal Professionals Call on Delaware Board of Pardons and Governor Markell to Grant Clemency to Robert Gattis**

### **Execution Scheduled for January 20, Even Though Evidence of Extreme Sexual, Physical, and Psychological Abuse Was Never Presented to Judge or Jury**

*(Dover, DE, Thursday, January 5, 2012)* Prominent individuals from across Delaware and the Tri-State area today called on the Delaware Board of Pardons to recommend and Governor Jack Markell to grant clemency to Robert Gattis. Mr. Gattis is scheduled to be executed on January 20, 2012 for the killing of his former girlfriend, Shirley Slay. He seeks to have his death sentence commuted to a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

Letters urging clemency were delivered to the Board of Pardons and the Governor today from twenty-five former judges and prosecutors, 73 faith leaders, and numerous mental health and legal professionals.

Distinguished individuals from Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania supporting clemency include: **Carl Schnee**, former U.S. Attorney, District of Delaware; **John Gibbons**, former Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit; **Deborah Poritz**, former Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court and former Attorney General of New Jersey; **Bishop Peggy A. Johnson** of the United Methodist Church in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference; **Most Reverend Francis Malooly**, Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington; **Reverend James L. Moseley**, Executive Presbyterian of New Castle Presbytery in Newark, DE; **Rabbi Michael Beals** of Beth Shalom in Wilmington; **Bishop Aretha Morton** of Tabernacle Full Gospel Baptist Cathedral in Wilmington; and **James Lafferty**, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association in Delaware.

Mr. Gattis was the victim of extreme childhood sexual abuse that neither the judge nor the jury was aware of at the time of his trial. As a pre-school child and through his teenage years, Mr. Gattis was raped and molested by a series of perpetrators, including both male and female family members. He suffered severe beatings and humiliation by his step-father and biological father and often witnessed the men beating his mother and other family members. Experts have called the abuse and neglect Mr. Gattis suffered as a child “catastrophic.”

In their letter to the Board and the Governor, the former judges and prosecutors wrote: “The death penalty must be reserved for the worst of the worst offenders. As former judges and prosecutors, we can attest that Mr. Gattis is not the worst of the worst by any measure. Mr. Gattis deserves to be punished for his crime and separated from free society, but he does not deserve to be executed.”

Having observed Mr. Gattis' genuine commitment to rehabilitation over twenty-one years in prison, corrections officers support his petition for clemency. Mr. Gattis' clemency petition includes statements from four corrections officers who describe him as a positive role model for younger inmates and a peacemaker in prison conflicts. In addition, Mr. Gattis has been a loving father to two sons and their young families as well as a devoted uncle, brother, friend, and mentor to nieces, nephews, and many other young people.

In their letter, the faith leaders wrote: "Sparing Robert's life is an act of mercy that represents Delaware at its best . . . . His true remorse and contrition are clearly evident in how he has lived his life in prison for twenty-one years where he has shown real, genuine and sustained commitment to redemption and rehabilitation."

The childhood sexual abuse was often violent and occurred when Mr. Gattis was left in the care of family members who should have protected him. As a small child, he showed signs of trauma, but no one intervened to help him.

Mental health professionals wrote: "His abuse resulted in compulsive behaviors, self harm, suicide attempts and substance abuse. Mr. Gattis has been diagnosed as suffering symptoms from severe psychiatric conditions including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Major Depression and Borderline Personality Disorder . . . . [But] it is not too late to help Robert Gattis and prevent the additional suffering which will come from his execution."

In a separate letter, Dr. Steven J. Berkowitz, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and Director, Penn Center for Youth and Family Trauma Response and Recovery, discussed the ironic contradiction between Delaware's response to the tragic sexual abuse scandal in the State and Mr. Gattis' scheduled execution: "The State of Delaware appropriately reacted with tremendous concern and financial support for the children sexually abused by Dr. Bradley with the knowledge that they could possibly experience life-long impairment, including violent behavior, if not treated. Yet Mr. Gattis, who suffered severe sexual and physical abuse and other traumatizing experience as a child, received no intervention or treatment and is now sentenced to death for behaving in the very way that the State has worked so hard to prevent for the children abused by Dr. Bradley."

As the former judges and prosecutors state, the death penalty is intended to be reserved for the worst of the worst, but Mr. Gattis is not the worst kind of offender by any means. Mr. Gattis' clemency petition details numerous other offenders in Delaware who committed crimes similar to Mr. Gattis' and were sentenced to life in prison or a term of years. The existence of these cases suggests that Mr. Gattis' death sentence was disproportionate to the crime.

To view some of the letters delivered today and the clemency petition, and for more information about the Robert Gattis case, please go to: [www.robertgattisclemency.com](http://www.robertgattisclemency.com).

To speak with attorneys for Mr. Gattis, please contact Laura Burstein at [laura.burstein@ssd.com](mailto:laura.burstein@ssd.com) or 202-626-6868.

###