



PARDON PROJECT
STEERING COMMITTEE

Rev. Dr. Michelle Anne Simmons, Chair
Evan Figueroa-Vargas, Vice Chair
PPSC@plsephilly.org

By Email

The Honorable Tom Wolf, Governor
508 Main Capitol Building,
Harrisburg, PA 17120

September 14, 2020

Dear Governor Wolf:

Thank you so much for being an ally in so many very important areas, from your thoughtful response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to your support of important criminal justice reform, to your backing of the Black Lives Matter movement.

You have been so very important to Pennsylvania, in so many ways that affect the quality of our lives and our futures, that it pains us to write this letter to you. But we think the way you are treating applicants for pardons is not just wrong but immoral, and we are writing to ask you to please change your ways and set an example for all Governors to follow.

The Pardon Project Steering Committee is made up of people who have had been convicted of crime when we were younger. Some of us are still on parole or probation; most of us have completed our sentences; all of us have been out of prison for years. All of us have learned from our experiences and have mended our ways. We are doing our very best to aspire to be the best we can be.

Thanks to you, Lt. Governor Fetterman, and Secretary Brandon Flood, we all have hope of a better life, where we can provide for our families and escape poverty. That hope is the pardon. For over a year now we have been working closely with Secretary Flood to make the system more open and friendly to people like us who cannot afford a lawyer. We are teaching people to be Pardon Coaches, have put together and are sharing lots of materials, we are letting people know by Facebook, magazines and other ways, and we have made videos to help others: <https://www.plsephilly.org/video-library>.

None of that means anything if those who make it through the process and get a recommendation from the Board don't get help from you. In fact, it's far worse: you get excited and make plans, and then they all

The Pardon Project is an initiative of Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE)
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come crashing down when nothing happens. You are heaping despair on them. Some who came to one of our meetings got her pardon recommendation in September 2019 and you still have not signed it, and she is a wonderful person. Do you have any idea of the hurt this has caused her and her family?

We've read there are more than 200 people like her. That, Sir, is shameful, simply shameful. As one of our members said: "If the Governor were still running his cabinet supply business, there's no doubt that these orders would have been filled right away. And lives, not kitchens, are at stake here!"

Please make it a part of your day, EVERY day, to spend 20 minutes signing pardons. People need hope. People who have made it to your desk deserve the second chance in life that only you can give.

With great respect, and on behalf of the entire Steering Committee and the people we aim to help, we ask that you please be inspired and do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Rev. Michelle Anne Simmons, Chair

cc: Lt. Gov. John Fetterman
Brandon Flood, Secretary of the Board of Pardons

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Rev. Dr. Michelle Anne Simmons, Chair
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By email

October 16, 2020

Honorable Tom Wolf, Governor
508 Main Capitol Building,
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

On September 14, 2020, I wrote a letter to you not only on behalf of the Pardon Project Steering Committee, but also the hundreds of people who are living in our communities, suffering under the stigma and burdens of having been long ago convicted of a crime, and waiting for your signature.

At the time I wrote, there were over 200 people on that list, waiting for the second chance that the Board of Pardons, after years of investigation, had concluded they deserved. While it turns out that you had approved over 180 of them a few weeks earlier, in fact it took over a month to let them know.

In my letter last month, I urged you to please make it a part of your day, EVERY day, to spend 20 minutes signing pardons. I know my letter was delivered to you on September 14 because it went to you by email, and your office acknowledged its receipt. More than a month later, you've not answered my letter, and you've not issued any more pardons.

We know that there are another 124 people (and their families) waiting for you to use your pen, for whom pardons were recommended at the Board of Pardons' hearings in March and June - - and that's not counting the 131 that are now on their way to your desk from September's hearings.

Governor Wolf, you are a good man, but this is shameful. You owe these people your best efforts; they don't deserve to be afterthoughts. So I ask you again: **will you make signing pardons a part of your day, every day?** People who have made it to your desk deserve the second chance in life that only you can give, and they deserve to be your priority.

On behalf of the entire Steering Committee and the people we aim to help, we ask that you please be inspired and start doing the right thing. Sincerely,

Rev. Michelle Anne Simmons, Chair

Cc: Lt. Gov. John Fetterman, Chair, Board of Pardons
Brandon Flood, Secretary, Board of Pardons

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