

Senator Vincent Hughes Obtains Community and Economic Development Funding to Create 15 New Pardon Hubs

January 21, 2020— Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that, thanks to the leadership and vision of State Senator Vincent J. Hughes, it has been awarded a \$75,000 grant to train community organizations and volunteers so they can help residents with criminal records in their past to apply for pardons and a fresh start for themselves and their families.

“I have focused my work in the Senate on achieving a New Deal for a New Pennsylvania, and that means supporting programs that uplift the people of this state and allow them to prosper,” said Senator Hughes. “For too long, we have thoughtlessly made it impossible for people to turn over a new leaf after they have fully served their sentences. All of us benefit when each of us has the opportunity to work with dignity, pay their bills, and take care of their families.”

“Thanks to the inspired leadership of Lieutenant Governor Fetterman, Attorney General Shapiro, and Governor Wolf,” the Senator continued, “people who can show that they have turned their lives around and are now contributing to society have the very real opportunity to be forgiven for their past crimes. What they need is help filling out the government forms and telling their stories. This grant will demonstrate how, with very little effort, non-profits and communities of faith can help individuals in their neighborhoods get the new deal they and their families deserve.”

Under the terms of the grant, PLSE will train 15 well-established, community-based non-profits in low-income/high arrest neighborhoods to be “Pardon Hubs” – resource centers that can help neighbors fill out pardon applications. Using a “train the trainer” approach, PLSE expects to train at least 10 “Pardon Coaches” per Hub so they can help applicants tell their stories about how they have been rehabilitated and deserve a second chance. Each Hub will also have informational flyers giving practical advice, plus access to a video library where people who have gone through the pardon application process share what they learned.

Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman, who chairs the Board of Pardons, confirmed how important cleaning up criminal records is to the economic health of neighborhoods. “Before coming to Harrisburg, I was a mayor for thirteen years. I know first-hand that criminal records are a major factor in keeping families and whole communities in poverty,” he said. “From Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, our workforce development agencies report that convictions ten, fifteen or even twenty years old are totally stopping people with families to support from getting available jobs for which they are qualified. Organizing community non-profits around helping their neighbors clean up old criminal history records is a terrific idea. There’s just no doubt that every community will do better economically if their members are allowed to be as productive and successful as they possibly can be. I don’t know of anyone who could be against that.”

“For almost a decade, PLSE has been the statewide leader in expunging criminal records,” said Ryan Allen Hancock, chair of the PLSE Board of Directors. “The reforms made over the past year by the state Board of Pardons, under Lt. Governor Fetterman’s leadership, have put that goal within reach for hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians. We cannot thank Senator Hughes and Lt. Governor Fetterman enough for their commitment to this very important goal.”

ABOUT SENATOR HUGHES: Vincent J. Hughes has served the commonwealth as a member of the Pennsylvania Senate for more than 20 years. In 2010, his colleagues elected him to be the Democratic Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and he continues to bring proactive leadership to that role. As a key member of the Senate's Democratic leadership team, Sen. Hughes is a champion for major policy issues such as expanding healthcare for low-income workers, raising the minimum wage, defending the right to vote, fighting for increased funding for public education, and rebuilding the state's distressed communities.

ABOUT LT. GOVERNOR FETTERMAN: The 34th lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania, John Fetterman is focused on commonsense reforms that benefit the middle class, people living in poverty, and marginalized communities. As chair of the state's Board of Pardons, Fetterman is committed to streamlining Pennsylvania's clemency application process and making pardons and commutations more accessible to deserving applicants. Since taking office, Fetterman has waived the pardons fee for applicants, rewritten the application, hired a pardon recipient to oversee the Board of Pardons, and hired two commuted lifers to visit prisons and explain the commutation process to inmates. Prior to his election as Lieutenant Governor, Fetterman served as mayor of Braddock, PA, for 13 years.

ABOUT PHILADELPHIA LAWYERS FOR SOCIAL EQUITY: PLSE provides free legal representation to low income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, creating community-based Pardon Hubs, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed systemic reforms. PLSE is a recent recipient of the Barra Award as an Exemplary Non-Profit Organization.

CONTACTS:

Wesley Robinson
Press Secretary
Senator Vincent Hughes, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
717.787.3497
502.930.9773
Wesley.Robinson@pasenate.com

Christina Kauffman
Press Secretary
Lt. Gov. John Fetterman
Main Capitol | Room 200
(c) 717-712-3316
chrkauffma@pa.gov

Katherine Zuk
Director of Communications & Outreach
Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity
267-519-5323
zuk@plsephilly.org