



Akeem Sims, Chair Rev. Dr. Michelle Simmons, Immediate Past Chair Paula Budnick, Secretary
PPSC@plsephilly.org

July 26th, 2024

Honorable Josh Shapiro, Governor

Fixing the Unacceptable and Intolerable Pardon System

Dear Governor Shapiro:

We are all so very excited and proud to hear your name, daily, as the potential candidate for Vice President running with Kamala Harris. The Pardon Project Steering Committee (PPSC) is a statewide association of people with lived experience in the criminal justice system, and you can be sure of our support when that happens.

But before you go out on the road— either as her running-mate or as her proxy – speaking about how this coming election is a battle to preserve the dream of America, you really need to fix a system that is totally broken, which you know very well, and which is currently crushing those dreams.

You know it is taking one full year for an application for a pardon to go from “received” to “filed” – because that’s how long it was taking when you were on the Board of Pardons. What you may not know, but which your Lt. Governor does, is that it is now taking SIX YEARS to go from “filed” to the Merit Review. Six years! Why? Because the Board is meeting only three times per year (it met four times per year when you were on it) and has adopted a program that allows accelerated review of only a very small portion of obviously-deserving candidates.

And then, once it gets the BOP’s recommendation, after all of its investigation, it comes to you – where they sit on your desk for 6, 8, 10, 12 months or more without action. One of our members suffers greatly as a result of your inattention: she has very elderly parents and a brain-damaged brother for whom she cannot serve as a guardian because of her conviction **35 years ago** for a financial crime she committed when she was a young developer of affordable housing. She made good on the loss, and hurt no one. The BOP recommended her for a pardon back in November. Eight months later, it remains on your desk. That is a tragedy. She goes to sleep every night praying that something does not happen to her parents that would cause them to need a guardian.

Pardon Project Steering Committee
Recipient, 2022 Reentry Organization of the Year
Philadelphia Reentry Coalition Awards

230 S. Broad Street, Suite 1102, Philadelphia PA 19102 ▲ www.plsephilly.org/PPSC

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This problem is easier to fix than the I-95 bridge. The BOP needs to meet more often, and you need to make time every day to review pardon applications – and set yourself the requirement that you act on them within 30-60 days, the same kind of requirement you have imposed on the agencies that work for you.

As we all get excited about the national election and as we get even more proud of you and what you can do for our county, please, please, please do not forget those of us who need the freedom from the criminal justice system that we have earned. You and Lt. Gov. Davis could fix this in three days if you put your minds to it. We are all praying for you to do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Rev. Dr. Michelle Simmons
Chair and Gina Vazquez Co-Chair of The MAPP Committee
(Making All Pardons a Priority)

Cc: Honorable Austin Davis, Lt. Governor
Honorable Akbar Hossain, Policy Secretary
Honorable Shelley Watson, Secretary, BOP