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DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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STATEMENT OF DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT DUNHAM
ON MURDER OF DEATH-ROW EXONEREE CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

“Mr. Williams’ death is heartbreaking.

“When innocent people are finally freed from death row, that does not mean that their struggles are over. While they no longer face legal jeopardy from their wrongful convictions, they can never recover the time they lost with their families or the opportunities freedom would have provided. Chris, like all Pennsylvania exonerees, received no state compensation for the time he was wrongfully on death row and no transition services.

“Exonerees also often face the stigma of public disbelief in their innocence, a stigma made worse by the actions of prosecutors in many jurisdictions who continue to falsely assert that they convicted the right person. The fact that Chris was falsely accused, wrongfully charged, and wrongfully convicted of multiple murders only made matters worse.

“Today, our thoughts are with Chris’ family and friends, who also were victims of his wrongful conviction and now are victimized by this senseless act of violence. My thoughts are also with my former colleagues in the Philadelphia and Harrisburg federal defender offices who fought tirelessly to win his freedom.

“We also remember two other Philadelphia death-row exonerees whose lives were cut short by what they experienced on death row: William Nieves, whose medical condition that was untreated while he was on death row led to his premature death too soon after his release, and Harold Wilson, whose posttraumatic stress disorder from more than a decade-and-a-half in death-row solitary confinement exacerbated other health problems and shortened his life.

“Too often, we forget about exonerees once they are released from prison. It is our responsibility to do more, to provide meaningful compensation and re-entry services and educational and occupational services. May Chris rest in peace, and may we all dedicate ourselves to doing better for his fellow exonerees.”

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