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June 8, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf  
Governor of Pennsylvania  
225 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

The killing of George Floyd by a police officer was heinous. However, that killing is emblematic of an occurrence that many of our citizens of color fear, an officer using excessive force without any sense of reasonableness or fairness or for the regard of the sanctity of that life, no matter the circumstances. As you know, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46 year old black man, was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota as a white police officer knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes while Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down on the street. Floyd begged for his life and repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." The video of George Floyd's last conscious moments horrified the nation.

Pennsylvanians of diverse social and economic backgrounds, color, creed and gender want to see police reforms in face of this frightening, but not isolated, example of police brutality. As Speaker of the House, I would respectfully ask you to call a "special session" in accordance with Article II, Section 4, addressing the subject of policing reforms. The lives of all citizens matter, including the lives of those citizens of color. The phrase "Black lives matter" has real meaning to many, but especially to our citizens of black or brown color who feel threatened by a system that can disregard their humanity.

It is true that the legislature can review and pass bills addressing police reform without a special session. I am committed to personally reviewing all 13 House bills introduced by my colleagues to address this issue, all of which have been referred to the Judiciary Committee. I am committed to working towards passage of legislation that improves our law enforcement policing to "instill an environment of healing, understanding and trust" to cite the Fraternal Order of Police State Lodge President Les Neri. I ask all members, Democratic and Republican legislators, as well as stakeholders to work together with alacrity.

Challenging times provide challenges for opportunity, and we have an opportunity to show the nation that in Pennsylvania *all* men, women, and children are created equal and deserving of all

the dignity of being human and making it real. We stand in solidarity with those confronting racism and racial injustice.

Article I, § 1 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, entitled “Inherent rights of mankind,” provides as follows:

All men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and indefeasible rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, of acquiring, possessing and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness.

Many of my colleagues from the Democratic Caucus have called for legislative action with respect to police reforms to stop police brutality or the systematic encouragement of the same.

Rep. Jason Dawkins, Chairman of the Pennsylvania House Philadelphia Delegation said, “The safety of our communities and the officers who serve them should always be our top priority. Our suggested reforms begin in hopes of keeping us all safe, resident and police alike, so voices of protest can be heard while our neighborhoods and the police who are there to protect them can do their jobs and better serve each resident of Philadelphia.”

Rep. Stephen Kinsey, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus said, “Too many times we’ve seen police using unauthorized tactics or excessive force, in some cases leading to deaths that could have been prevented. Our goal is to rebuild trust between officers and the community and that starts with accountability. We need to do better.”

Rep. Joanna McClinton, Chairwoman of the House Democratic Caucus said, “I am committed to working with my colleagues in the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus to pass the necessary reforms to help law enforcement weed out and hold bad actors accountable for their actions while working to strengthen community-police relations across the commonwealth.”

Please understand that most of our state and local police officers, who risk their lives every day for the safety of our citizens, perform their duties in a professional manner. The Pennsylvania State Troopers Association said in a statement: “What happened to George Floyd was horrific and wrong. ...Troopers go to work every day knowing that they may not return home to our loved ones. This is a sacrifice we accept because we have sworn an oath to uphold the laws of the commonwealth and the United States, without any consideration of class, color, creed or condition.”

The Fraternal Order of Police State Lodge President Les Neri said in a statement: “There is no place for racism in our profession or our society. Every person is created equal and thereby entitled to the exact same application and protection under the law. The 40,000 men and women of the PA FOP have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution, as well as to protect and serve the citizens of this commonwealth. ... We are firmly committed to working with stakeholders to create an environment of healing, understanding and trust.”

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As I said in my own statement issued May 31, 2020: “The killing of George Floyd by a police officer was depraved and senseless. Americans demand justice. The tragic incident exposes the need for fairness in all aspects of our national life. We need to promote educational choice and economic opportunity for all. We need to protect every life, from the unborn to the elderly. That is why we must address our criminal justice system in part by fostering renewed professionalism and decorum. We have yet to end racism and discrimination. We have come far, but not far enough.”

We are witnessing protests all across the globe, our country and in many Pennsylvania cities including, amongst others, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the capital city of Harrisburg against police brutality and racial injustice.

Article II, § 4 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, in relevant part, establishes:

Special sessions shall be called by the Governor on petition of a majority of the members elected to each House or may be called by the Governor whenever in his opinion the public interest requires.

Seven governors in the past 60 years have called for 17 special sessions, each on an important public policy matter. Sixteen of these special sessions were called directly by a governor. One was initiated by the signatures of a majority of members in both chambers of the legislature on a written petition.

The Republican and Democratic leaders of the House of Representatives are ready and willing to meet with you concerning a special session on police reform. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mike Turzai

Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Member, 28<sup>th</sup> Legislative District