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Contact: Laura Burstein at (202) 626-6868 or laura.burstein@ssd.com

Robert Gattis Petitions Delaware Board of Pardons for Clemency

Details of Extreme Sexual, Physical & Psychological Abuse Never Presented to Judge or Jury

(Dover, DE, Tuesday, January 3, 2011) Attorneys for Robert Gattis filed a petition for clemency today with the Delaware Board of Pardons which requests that the Board recommend to Governor Jack Markell a commutation of his death sentence to a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Mr. Gattis is currently scheduled to be executed on January 20, 2012 for the killing of his former girlfriend, Shirley Slay.

The clemency petition provides details of ongoing sexual childhood abuse that neither the jury nor the judge knew about at the time of sentencing. As a pre-school child and through adolescence, Robert Gattis was the victim of repeated rapes and molestations by multiple perpetrators, including both male and female family members. The sexual abuse he suffered was part of a pattern of violent incest that spanned generations in his family.

Mr. Gattis also suffered severe beatings and humiliation at the hands of his step-father and natural father. Psychological experts have called Mr. Gattis' childhood circumstances "catastrophic" and have diagnosed him as having post-traumatic stress disorder, borderline personality disorder, major depression, and other mental illnesses rooted in his childhood trauma.

"The kind of sexual, physical and psychological abuse that Mr. Gattis suffered is precisely the kind of information that a sentencing judge and jury should know when deciding whether to sentence someone to life or death, but Mr. Gattis's sentencing judge and jury never knew this information, said John Deckers, attorney for Mr. Gattis. "They did not have an accurate picture of Mr. Gattis or the crime, and clemency is the mechanism that allows the Governor to correct such mistakes in the legal system."

Former corrections officers attest to Mr. Gattis' sincere and enduring commitment to rehabilitation and believe that his life is worth saving. Mr. Gattis' clemency petition includes statements from four corrections officers who describe his positive influence on younger inmates, his role as a peacemaker in prison conflicts, and many other examples of good conduct. The corrections officers state how Mr. Gattis has consistently expressed deep remorse and contrition for the senseless killing of Ms. Slay.

Despite the odds, Mr. Gattis has been a loving father to two sons and their young families as well as a dedicated uncle, brother, friend, and mentor to many young people. Through letters, visits and phone calls, he has counseled them to make the right choices in life. For example, when two nephews had legal troubles, Mr. Gattis was

instrumental in getting them to accept responsibility and punishment and go on to hold down jobs and support their families.

“Mr. Gattis suffered unthinkable sexual assaults, beatings, and humiliations that affected his brain development, led to his mental illnesses, and crippled his ability to function as an adult. In more than 25 years of examining defendants, Mr. Gattis presents one of the most extreme cases of childhood abuse I have ever seen,” said Dr. Richard G. Dudley, Jr., a leading forensic psychiatrist who examined Mr. Gattis.

The death penalty is intended to be reserved for the worst of the worst, but Mr. Gattis is not the worst kind of offender by any means. Mr. Gattis’ clemency petition details eight other offenders in Delaware who committed crimes similar to Mr. Gattis’ and were sentenced to life in prison or a term of years. The existence of these cases suggests that Mr. Gattis’ death sentence was disproportionate to the crime.

Under circumstances similar to Mr. Gattis’ case, the governors of Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee have granted clemency to five men facing execution over the past three years.

The clemency petition, case history and other background about the case can be found at: www.robertgattisclemency.com.

To speak with attorneys for Mr. Gattis, please contact Laura Burstein at: laura.burstein@ssd.com or 202-626-6868.

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