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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
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Tuesday, October 15, 2019

Governor Kevin Stitt
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 North Lincoln Boulevard, Room 212
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Governor Stitt,

Thank you for making criminal justice reform a priority. The creation of efforts such as the RESTORE – Re-entry, Supervision, Treatment, and Opportunity – Taskforce and other programs ensure that Oklahomans who interact with our system receive a fair trial and restoration. The evidence is also clear that investment in mental health services, drug courts, and diversion programs work. Due process and equitable treatment under the law are common values and constitutional principles for our country. In keeping with these important priorities, I'm writing today about the long-standing Julius Jones case where significant questions surrounding his conviction linger.

As a member of the House Science, Space, and Technology committee, we are addressing the progress and future needs of forensic science. Last month, the Oklahoma Innocence Project's Executive Director, Vicki Zemp Behenna, gave compelling testimony before our committee on forensic science and the realities of wrongful convictions. The Oklahoma Innocence Project dedicates its time to identifying and remedying cases of wrongful convictions in Oklahoma. While we have made great strides to improve the accuracy of evidence collection and verification, these situations are far too common and prove that there is still more work to be done.

To date, 367 individuals convicted of murder, rape, and other violent crimes across 37 states have been exonerated as a result of DNA evidence. Those individuals served an average of 14 years in prison prior to their release. Twenty of them even spent time on death row. Sadly, Oklahoma is in the top 10 for known, wrongful convictions. With these staggering statistics in mind, it's critical for us to be certain.

There is bipartisan agreement that the death penalty should not be undertaken where uncertainty remains. In 2013, the Oklahoma Justice Commission released recommendations that were backed by the Oklahoma Bar Association but have yet to be implemented. Many of these reforms would make a difference in cases like Julius Jones'. Therefore, I urge you to review this case and work towards the implementation of recommended reforms.

I look forward to working on future issues with you that continue to strengthen our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kendra S. Horn
Member of Congress