

## TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

**Dennis Watkins**, Prosecutor

Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter

**UPDATE:** February 21, 2025

### **Watkins writes leadership of OPAA about death penalty**



Prosecuting Attorney Dennis Watkins today sent a letter to the leadership of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association updating them on the recent events surround the attempts to restore the death penalty in Ohio and in the federal government.

Watkins last week sent separate letters to [U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi](#) and [Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost](#) thanking them for their

support of the death penalty and seeking their help in getting executions restarted in Ohio, which has been threatened by a new wave of state legislation.

In his most recent letter, Watkins is asking the OPAA leadership to speak out against the legislators attempt to “logroll” or package together several hot topics, such as the death penalty, abortion and assisted suicide, into the script of proposed House Bill 72. Watkins states this practice violates the constitution in Ohio.

The Watkins letter also quotes such past American leaders as President Ronald Reagan and Supreme Court Antonin Scalia, who both felt a functioning death penalty was necessary to maintain the American citizens’ way of life and keep society civilized. Watkins also praised the courage of former Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, who during December 2024 as he was leaving office, obtained the necessary drugs to execute a death row inmate and provide “some finality to the victims” after 15 years of delay.

This letter is addressed to OPAA President Keller J. Blackburn, prosecuting attorney of Athens County; OPAA Vice President Gwen Howe-Gebers, Henry County prosecutor, and OPAA President-Elect David P. Fornshell, prosecuting attorney in Warren County.

President Trump by Executive Order this year has lifted the prior Biden Administration’s moratorium on the death penalty in federal cases, while former President Biden did not

carry out one execution during his term of office and at the last minute commuted 37 death sentences in one day.

On Dec. 10, 2024, Watkins wrote an open letter to Ohio Association of Prosecuting Attorneys executive director Lou Tobin encouraging all Ohio prosecutors to join him to oppose the wholesale repeal of Ohio's historic death penalty law which was established in 1803. During 2024, Watkins traveled to Columbus twice to testify before legislative committees in support of the current death penalty law and in support of a bill that would add nitrogen hypoxia as a new method for execution.

For more information, contact Guy M. Vogrin, investigator / public information officer for the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office, at 330-675-2485. In coming weeks, Vogrin will be doing stories about death row offenders from all parts of Ohio where victims like Miriam Fife, have for years been "twisting in the wind," waiting for justice. Rhonda Whitelock, a best friend of one of Ohio's murder victims, said people need to know that efforts to restore the death penalty are ongoing in all parts of Ohio.

**[Mr. Watkins' Feb. 21 letter to OPAA leadership](#)**