

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Laughlin sues Erie Reader, Jim Wertz for July article falsely putting him on non-existent ‘pardons list’

ERIE – State Sen. Dan Laughlin today filed a defamation suit against The Erie Reader and contributing editor Jim Wertz for a July article falsely claiming he was on a list of people seeking criminal pardons from former President Donald Trump.

“There is no such list, nor was there ever such a request,” said Laughlin spokesman Dennis Roddy. “Jim Wertz imputed criminal conduct to Dan simply because he signed a friend-of-the-court brief along with 23 other members of the state senate.

“And that brief, contrary to Wertz’s reckless claims, never sought to overturn a single vote in the 2020 election, nor did it side with any plaintiff in the case.”

Laughlin, R-Millcreek, is seeking more than \$1 million in damages from both The Reader and Wertz, who also chairs the Erie County Democratic Committee.

“There was no pardons list, my name did not appear on it, nor would my participation in an informational brief to call the Supreme Court’s attention to a tangentially related issue have warranted one,” Laughlin said. “They just made this up.”

The dispute arose over Laughlin’s signature on what is called an “amicus curiae,” or friend-of-the-court brief, in connection with a lawsuit by the State of Texas. Texas attorney general Ken Paxton challenged the 2020 election results in four states, including Pennsylvania, contended that those states violated the Constitution when they enacted election law other than through the legislatures.

The Supreme Court declined to hear the Texas case.

Wertz attempted to link Laughlin to an email by Sen. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., requesting blanket pardons from President Trump for members of Congress who voted to reject the Electoral College votes of Arizona and Pennsylvania.

The email also requests pardons for, “Every Republican who signed the Amicus brief in the Texas lawsuit against other states deriving from their violation of Article I, Section 4 (and, perhaps, other) provision of the United States Constitution.”

Brooks’s email, however, referred to an entirely different amicus brief signed by members of Congress siding with Texas.

The amicus brief Laughlin signed specifically noted that it was filed, “in support of neither plaintiffs nor defendants.” Supreme Court rules specifically provide for amicus briefs filed in support of neither side.

The state senate amicus brief sought to call the court’s attention to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s decision to extend the deadline for mail-in ballots despite specific deadline language in the law passed by the general assembly. Laughlin and fellow signatories saw it as judicial overreach and requested clarification on the matter from the high court.

“We have been able to find no evidence that Wertz or the staff at The Erie Reader made any attempt to contact Sen. Laughlin or his representatives either to obtain comment, or to verify other things they asserted as fact,” Roddy said. “Sen. Laughlin could have called their attention to the cover sheet of the amicus which made clear it was filed, ‘In support of no party.’”

Laughlin’s case was filed in Erie County Court of Common Pleas.

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