



**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
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EDWARD G. RENDELL, Governor

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GOV. RENDELL ASKS U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL TO FILE CIVIL RIGHTS CHARGES IN SHENANDOAH BEATING DEATH

HARRISBURG – In a letter to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, Governor Edward G. Rendell has recommended that the Department of Justice pursue civil rights charges against two Schuylkill County individuals involved in the beating of Mexican immigrant Luis Ramirez in Shenandoah on July 12, 2008. Ramirez died two days later as a result of his injuries, which included two skull fractures.

The Governor said that the evidence and testimony presented during the trial justified charges against Brandon Piekarsky and Derrick Donchak for violating Ramirez's civil rights. Governor Rendell noted that one of the co-conspirators in the case, Colin Walsh, has already plead guilty to civil rights violations.

"The evidence suggests that Mr. Ramirez was targeted, beaten and killed because he was Mexican," wrote Governor Rendell in the letter. "This beating was so brutal and violent that Mr. Ramirez's skull was crushed in two different places. This senseless and cowardly attack appears to have been a hate crime as racial slurs were hurled against Mr. Ramirez throughout the fatal assault.

"Such lawlessness and violence hurts not only the direct victim of the attack but also our towns and communities that are torn apart by such bigotry and intolerance. That is why I am pleased that the Department of Justice is presently investigating whether to bring civil rights charges against Piekarsky and Donchak for their role in the fatal beating of Mr. Ramirez. I believe that justice and fairness mandate such a prosecution."

After the jury rendered its decision earlier this month, Governor Rendell wrote the county's district attorney, James Goodman, stating his belief that Piekarsky and Donchak deserved the maximum possible sentence for their roles in the savage assault and killing of Ramirez.

In that letter, the Governor said while he did not wish to second-guess the jury's decision, he felt imposing the maximum possible sentence would send a message that this kind of senseless criminal behavior and ethnic intimidation is not appropriate.

The Rendell administration is committed to creating a first-rate public education system, protecting our most vulnerable citizens and continuing economic investment to support our communities and businesses. To find out more about Governor Rendell's initiatives and to sign up for his newsletter, visit www.governor.state.pa.us.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The text of the letter Governor Rendell sent to Attorney General Holder follows:

The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
United States Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear General Holder:

On July 12, 2008, Luis Ramirez was savagely beaten to death by four individuals in Shenandoah, PA. This beating was so brutal and violent that Mr. Ramirez's skull was crushed in two different places. This senseless and cowardly attack appears to have been a hate crime as racial slurs were hurled against Mr. Ramirez throughout the fatal assault.

Two of the attackers cooperated with prosecutors and testified against their cohorts -- Brandon Piekarsky and Derrick Donchak. Despite eyewitness testimony that Piekarsky and Donchak savagely, senselessly, and fatally attacked Mr. Ramirez -- all while racial slurs were repeatedly hurled against him -- a jury acquitted both defendants of aggravated assault and ethnic intimidation. Piekarsky and Donchak were convicted only of minor crimes and face at the very most about 2 years in prison.

The evidence suggests that Mr. Ramirez was targeted, beaten and killed because he was Mexican. Such lawlessness and violence hurts not only the direct victim of the attack but also our towns and communities that are torn apart by such bigotry and intolerance. That is why I am pleased that the Department of Justice is presently investigating whether to bring civil rights charges against Piekarsky and Donchak for their role in the fatal beating of Mr. Ramirez. As you are aware a co-conspirator Colin Walsh has already plead guilty of violating Mr. Ramirez's civil rights.

The Justice Department has a fine tradition of successfully prosecuting those who have violated the civil rights of others following an acquittal in state court of criminal charges -- including convictions of Lemrick Nelson for his role in the death of Yankel Rosenbaum and convictions of Officers Laurence Powell and Stacey Koon for their roles in the beating of Rodney King.

While I do not have access to all the information you have, unless there is something that has not heretofore appeared in the public domain, I strongly recommend that your office bring civil rights charges against Piekarsky and Donchak. I believe that justice and fairness mandate such a prosecution.

I very much appreciate your serious attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Edward G. Rendell, Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania