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August 8, 2019

PRESS RELEASE

**State Constables Arrested for Official Oppression Related to
Working on Mariner East Pipeline Project**

Chester County District Attorney Chief of Staff Charles Gaza announced the arrest of two state constables for illegally using their elected positions and authority for their own personal profit working on the Mariner East Pipeline. The defendants have been charged with official oppression, Ethics Act violations, and related offenses.

Michael Robel is 58 years old. He resides in Shamokin, Pennsylvania. He is a constable in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. Kareem Johnson is 47 years old. He resides in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. He is a constable in Coatesville, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Chief of Staff Gaza stated, "We cannot have elected law enforcement officials hiring themselves out and using their public positions for personal profit. It undermines the integrity and independence of law enforcement and our government."

The facts alleged in the criminal complaints are as follows:¹

In Pennsylvania, state constables are elected officials. They are responsible for preserving the peace at polling places during elections. They are authorized by statute to serve arrest warrants and various forms of civil process, transport criminal

¹ A criminal defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in court.

defendants for court purposes, serve as courtroom security, and make arrests in limited circumstances, including for breach of the peace and violations of borough ordinances, along with a variety of other conduct directly related to these functions. They are paid by the courts at rates and in manners codified by statute. As elected officials, they are obligated by the Public Official and Employee Ethics Act to file annually a statement of financial interest containing, among other contents, the name and address of any source of income in the amount of \$1,300 or more. The Ethics Act further prohibits the use of the office of State Constable for the constable's private pecuniary benefit.

In December of 2018, the Chester County District Attorney's Office (the "DAO") opened a criminal investigation into activity related to the construction of the Mariner East Pipeline project in Chester County, Pennsylvania by Energy Transfer, L.P. and subsidiaries Sunoco Logistics and Sunoco Pipeline, L.P. Collectively, these entities are commonly referred to as "Sunoco."

During the initial stages of the investigation, information was developed that state constables were being hired to use their authority as elected law enforcement officials for private security interests. Residents of Chester County reported that armed security guards identified themselves as constables while on the homeowner's property.

On January 21, 2019, a plainclothes detective was on duty conducting an investigation parked on Lisa Drive in West Whiteland Township. The detective was parked in a legal public parking area on the public street. A subject approached the detective's window and identified himself as state constable Mike Robel. Constable Robel stated that the detective could not be parked in the area and had to park down the street. Robel was wearing a patrol style duty belt with a firearm and displayed his Pennsylvania state constable badge. Robel stated that he was from Northumberland County and that he was employed by Sunoco.

Detectives interviewed Daniel Zegart in reference to the Sunoco Pipeline project. Mr. Zegart is a journalist. He stated that on June 5, 2018 he was parked on Lisa Drive writing some notes for a story. He was photographed by a pipeline worker in construction gear. Mr. Zegart recorded the incident on his cell phone. In the video, he was told to speak to an individual identified by the pipeline worker as a State Constable. Mr. Zegart then made contact with a subject wearing a hard hat, neon construction vest, and displaying a badge and polo shirt that appeared to have the state seal on it. The Constable instructed Mr. Zegart not to step off of the street. Upon further investigation it was confirmed that the constable in the video was

Kareem Johnson. Kareem Johnson is a Constable in Coatesville, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Investigation revealed that both Robel and Johnson were subcontracted to work security by a Harrisburg company doing business as Raven Knights. The Constables were recruited and asked to provide copies of their state constable certification cards and firearm cards as a condition of employment.

Banking records revealed that Raven Knights paid Michael Robel \$27,995 from 2018 through 2019 for his work as private security for the Sunoco Pipeline project in Chester County. Records also revealed that Kareem Johnson was paid \$36,785 in 2018 for his work as private security in Chester County. Records showed that Robel failed to report this 2018 income on his Statement of Financial Interests form. Kareem Johnson failed to report this income on a Statement of Financial Interests form for 2018, as required under the Pennsylvania Ethics Act.

The defendants have been charged with official oppression, Ethics Act violations, and bribery.

The defendants were arrested this morning. They turned themselves in, were arraigned, and bail was set at \$25,000 unsecured. Preliminary hearings are scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on August 29, 2019, in District Court 15-4-03, 748 Springdale Drive, Exton, Pennsylvania.

Investigation of the Mariner East Pipeline construction in Chester County is ongoing. Chief of Staff Gaza added, "After the District Attorney's Office discovered and reported on this misuse of state constables, this practice will stop in Chester County. Prosecutors across Pennsylvania need to check and determine if the same abuses of power have been occurring in their counties."

Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan stated, "There is a troubling aspect to this investigation that bears note. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection is charged with protecting Pennsylvania residents. However, DEP and has retained criminal defense lawyers to represent them in this investigation, and have insisted that all communications go through those lawyers. Imagine if the West Chester Police Department was investigating a burglary with the DAO, but retained criminal defense lawyers to represent the police department and would only communicate with the DAO through the defense lawyers. In almost 30 years working in the criminal justice system, I have never seen a state or federal agency retain criminal defense lawyers to communicate with the prosecutors that the

agencies were supposed to be helping. It raises questions for the public about what exactly is going on with the Mariner East Pipeline and Pennsylvania's government. Governor Wolf needs to answer these questions."

This case was investigated by the Chester County Detectives. Anybody with further information should contact Detective Bernard Martin at 610-344-6866. The assigned prosecutors are Alex Gosfield, Myles Matteson, and Seth Weber.

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Approved for release:

Charles A. Gaza