

Justice for Battered Women

Free Claudia Reddy

There is no justice in the state of California for battered women who are serving life sentences for killing their abusive spouses. In a unanimous decision, on May 14, the Board of Prison Terms (parole board) made it crystal clear that even dying battered women won't be released from prison when it denied compassionate release for Claudia Reddy.

Claudia Reddy, a 42 year old Dominican woman, is dying of lung cancer at the California Institution for Women. She is serving a 15-life sentence on a second degree murder charge for defending herself. Claudia has already been in prison for over 14 years. Claudia describes in her own words, the violent attacks that she suffered from her abusive husband:

"He was from [a] culture where the role of women is much different. . . His jealous possessiveness, however, exploded into physical abuse of me behind closed doors — a shameful secret that hovered like a cloud over our marriage. A heavy drinker, my husband hit me so hard that the retina of one eye was knocked loose — resulting in partial blindness in the eye. A swift kick to my stomach while I was pregnant resulted in a tragic miscarriage. Subsequent miscarriages resulted from other brutalities. An impression of his teeth remain in a semicircular sore on my forearm. . . Terrified and fearing for my life during one of his attacks, I grabbed his gun to defend myself. I was arrested and found myself convicted of 2nd degree murder."

Claudia is currently confined to a wheelchair. A thin, slight woman, she has trouble swallowing the food that is prepared for her because the cancer has spread to her esophagus. Medical staff gives her oxygen at night so she can breathe. She has been given a prognosis of less than two months to live. Claudia married a very kind gentle man while in prison. Her husband would like to take care of Claudia during this last period of her life.

We are starting a letter writing campaign to both Governor Wilson's office and the parole board to demand immediate clemency for Claudia Reddy. Her clemency petition has been sitting on the governor's desk for over four years. We ask that you write in her support today. Address your letters to: Governor Pete Wilson, State Capitol Building, Sacramento, CA 95814 and Chairman James Nielson, Board of Prison Terms, 428 J Street, 6th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814. The message is simple:

Dear Governor Wilson (or Chairman Nielson, BPT):

I am both upset and concerned that Claudia Reddy, a woman prisoner dying of cancer, was recently denied compassionate release by the Board of Prison Terms. I support her clemency petition and urge you to order her immediate release. Ms. Reddy has less than two months to live and is not a danger to society. You have the power to right this wrong by granting clemency to Claudia Reddy.

For more information, contact the Compassionate Release Program of the HIV/AIDS in Prison Project, (510) 834-5656, ext. 3150 or the California Coalition for Women Prisoners, (415) 255-7036, ext. 4.