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### **CLERGY MEMBERS URGE GOVERNOR TO GRANT CLEMENCY PETITIONS**

Several religious leaders are joining together to call on Governor Jay Nixon to rely on principles of mercy and forgiveness as he reviews hundreds of clemency petitions by prisoners in the last weeks before he leaves office. Rabbi Susan Talve of the Central Reform Congregation, Reverend Karen Anderson of Ward Chapel AME Church, and Monsignor Jack Schuler of Catholic Charities have joined with Father Chris Collins, S.J., assistant to the President for Mission and Identity at Saint Louis University, to add their voices to a coalition of attorneys and other advocates representing prisoners seeking clemency.

The Community Coalition for Clemency specifically asks for Governor Jay Nixon to commute the sentences of 15 women who are incarcerated in Missouri prisons. Most of the women are victims of domestic abuse and some have spent more than 30 years in prison. Seven of the women are age 60 or older with four of the inmates over the age of 65 and several are serving life terms. The oldest is 74 years old.

“We’re proud to come forward as representatives of a variety of faiths to observe that all faiths share common ground on the principles of mercy and forgiveness,” said Father Collins. “Pope Francis has called on government leaders to consider clemency for prisoners, not just those who have already served their sentences. We ask for compassion on the men and women in Missouri’s prisons, especially those who have already served long, and by today’s standards, unduly harsh sentences.”

Rabbi Talve said, “One of the prayers recited in the Jewish morning blessings asks for the freeing of the captives. It teaches us that we must not forget those who have served enough time and are no longer a threat to the community. It calls on us to balance justice with mercy, to leave room for forgiveness and to show compassion to those who long for the freedom that we believe they are due.”

Also joining the call for clemency at Saint Louis University was Stacey Lannert, who was granted clemency by former Governor Blunt. Lannert is now a law student at the University of Missouri School of Law and is an example of the productive life a person can lead if given the chance through mercy shown by society.

The Coalition believes clemency is appropriate for these women in question because they pose no threat to public safety and most are serving harsher sentences than they would have received if convicted today. According to the Coalition, all of the women received sentences disproportionate to their crimes, and in some cases, more severe than those received by men convicted of similar crimes.

### **Clemency in Missouri**

The power of clemency is granted to the governor in the Missouri Constitution. Its purpose is to allow for the show of mercy and to correct injustices in the criminal justice system. Several recent Missouri governors of both political parties have granted numerous clemencies to offenders, including Matt Blunt, John Ashcroft, Mel Carnahan and Bob Holden. Former Governor Holden is a member of the Coalition seeking clemency.

### **Members**

A former Missouri governor, Bob Holden, current and former Missouri legislators, law professors, attorneys, and law students, community leaders and advocates are members of the Coalition. Members also include the faculty and students of the Saint Louis University Legal Clinic, the Georgetown University School of Law, and the WILLOW project at Webster University. A complete list of current members is attached.

One of the primary partners in this Coalition is the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, which has a list of agencies that can help victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. <http://www.mocadsv.org/>

### **Additional Resources**

For a review of clemency activity across the country, go to [www.pardonpower.com](http://www.pardonpower.com).

### **Contact Governor Nixon**

To contact Governor Nixon in support of clemency petitions, go to [www.governor.mo.gov](http://www.governor.mo.gov).

### ***About the Community Coalition for Clemency***

The Community for Coalition for Clemency was formed in 2014 by a group of concerned Missouri law professors, attorneys, law students, community leaders, former and current legislators and a former Missouri Governor. The purpose of the organization is to advocate for incarcerated women in Missouri, many of whom were the victims of domestic violence and who received sentences that were disproportionate to their crimes, and in many cases, harsher than what men have received in similar circumstances. These women pose no threat to public safety, and have already served significant sentences. The group is led by Saint Louis University Legal Clinics, Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Webster University Department of Legal Studies and Women and Gender Studies Program and the law firm of Armstrong Teasdale.

### **About Saint Louis University School of Law**

Saint Louis University School of Law was founded in 1843 and is the oldest law school west of the Mississippi River. The strength of the faculty, breadth of course offerings and extensive clinical and professional skills experience provide students with a well-rounded legal education. The School of Law's rich history consists of strong connections to the community and a long tradition of public service. SLU

LAW's location in the heart of the City of St. Louis, offers students unparalleled access to leading law firms, corporations, government agencies and non-profit organizations — and a unique opportunity to see the law in action. For more information, visit [law.slu.edu](http://law.slu.edu).