

California Coalition for Battered Women in Prison
100 McAllister Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, California, 94102

September 18, 2001

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of the California Coalition for Battered Women in Prison (CCBWP) in support of Sheryl Ann Snodgrass's petition for clemency. CCBWP is a statewide coalition of community activists, lawyers, and students working with and for incarcerated survivors of domestic violence.

Studies show that the majority of women in prisons across the country are survivors of domestic violence. Intimate partner abuse is often a cause of a woman's involvement in a crime, but remains unidentified in her file for several reasons.

In our society, a woman is judged by her ability to be a good mother and wife. Women who are emotionally, physically, and psychologically abused by their intimate partners are made to feel like failures. As a result, many survivors of domestic violence like Ms. Snodgrass remain silent about the abuse because they feel ashamed. Others are silent for fear of retaliation from their abusers, who threaten to harm the women or their family should they tell authorities. Those who do speak of the abuse are often not believed by law enforcement.

For these and other reasons, many survivors of domestic violence receive unjustly long sentences because the history of abuse was never brought up during the criminal justice process. However, the unique circumstances of survivors of domestic violence must be taken into account when determining culpability for a crime. Therefore, when women finally gain enough courage to speak about their abusive pasts, it is vitally important that their sentences be reconsidered in the name of justice.

Keeping Ms. Snodgrass in prison is a waste of taxpayer money and does not serve deterrence, rehabilitation, or incapacitation goals. Battered women who kill their abusers in self-defense pose no threat to society; women who kill their abusers do so as a last resort in defense of their own lives and/or the lives of their children. Ms. Snodgrass has already served 20 years in prison and has accepted responsibility for her actions.

CCBWP urges you to seriously consider her petition, along with those of other battered women who have already served time. By granting Ms. Snodgrass' clemency petition, you would be joining both Republican and Democratic governors in over 22 states who have also granted clemency to more than 150 battered women who were serving time for killing or assaulting their abusers. With the movement to end violence against women now in its fourth decade, the public is beginning to understand many of the misperceptions surrounding domestic violence and

battered women. Your decision to grant clemency to survivors of domestic violence would be supported by advocates and the public nationwide. The Coalition sincerely hopes that you will join this nationwide movement.

Sincerely,

Olivia Wang
Member, California Coalition for Battered Women in Prison