

November 6, 2001

## *The Patrick Crusade*

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Governor of Iowa  
State Capitol Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319

People Aligned  
to Replace Injustice and Cruelty  
with Knowledge

Re: Sheryl Snodgrass, request for clemency

Dear Governor Vilsack:

I am writing on behalf of the P.A.T.R.I.C.K. Crusade, a non-profit human rights organization that is well known in this country and abroad for its work in assisting prisoners.

Sheryl Snodgrass was 23 years old when she was sent to prison in 1982 for the murder of her abusive husband. Her attorney still believes to this day that she was not the person who pulled the trigger, but even if she were, she should not serve the rest of her life for being a battered wife. In doing so, her life of being victimized would merely be compounded with punishment. Sheryl's three children were small at the time of her arrest and today they are grown. We believe Sheryl has served more than sufficient time and should have her sentenced reduced so that she may be eligible for parole.

Clemency has a long history in our country. It is granted to people of poverty, friendless condition, youth, old age, and to those who are sincerely penitent or have engaged in good conduct and were reformed. Clemency has even been granted to encourage reformation in individuals and good conduct among other prisoners. Personal characteristics of the individual petitioner all play in considering in Clemency decision-making.

Sheryl Snodgrass has gone the extra mile to rehabilitate herself while in prison. First and foremost, she has accepted responsibility for the crime and acknowledges her terrible, irreversible mistakes. She has dedicated her life to the Lord and she is very active in the church and its prison ministry. It is no secret that Sheryl has expressed extreme remorse for the death of her husband, even as abusive as he was. She clearly never wanted it to happen in the first place, and has expressed that she would do anything to undo the events of the past, but she recognizes that her mistake is irreversible.

In addition, Ms. Snodgrass obtained a GED, completed a vocational course in clerical skills, as well as several hours of college credit in various areas since she's been in prison. These are the markings of a rehabilitated prisoner. She was an unskilled housewife without a high school diploma when she began her life sentence.

Article IV, Section 16 of the Iowa Constitution provides: *The governor shall have power to grant reprieves, commutations and pardons, after conviction, for all offences except treason and cases of impeachment, subject to such regulations as may be provided by law. Upon conviction for treason, he shall have power to suspend the execution of the sentence until the case shall be reported to the general assembly at its next meeting, when the general assembly shall either grant a pardon, commute the sentence, direct the execution of the sentence, or grant a further reprieve. He shall have power to remit fines and forfeitures, under such regulations as may be prescribed by law; and shall report to the general assembly, at its next meeting, each case of reprieve, commutation, or pardon granted, and the reasons*

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PATRICK CRUSADE HEADQUARTERS

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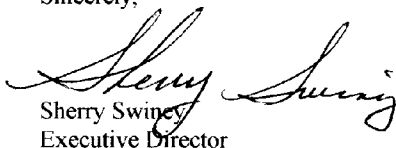


- Six million women are beaten by their husbands or boyfriends each year in the U.S.; 1500 of them die.
- In the U.S., a woman is more likely to be assaulted, injured, raped, or killed by a male partner than any other type of assailant.
- Battering is the number one cause of injury to women in the U.S. Attacks by husbands on wives result in more injuries requiring medical treatment than rapes, muggings, and auto accidents combined.
- Violence will occur at least once in two thirds of all marriages.
- 30% of female homicide victims are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
- Eight million children are affected by domestic violence each year.
- Domestic violence occurs among all races and socioeconomic groups.

The above studies indicate that women who defend themselves against violence are punished too severely and we do not think this is fair. I believe that, once you think on these things, you will also believe this is neither fair nor righteous. What purpose does it serve society to hold Sheryl Snodgrass in prison for the rest of her life when she was acting out of self-defense in the first place? And if self-defense is a crime, then – as it is with men – a sentence of life in prison should not be the punishment, but rather a few years at the max.

Accordingly, we urge you to consider granting clemency to Sheryl Snodgrass. She has survived domestic violence, she has survived prison time, and she will do well as a free citizen again. We pray you see that keeping her any longer is a waste of taxpayer money because it serves no purpose or profit to society. We join her other supporters in urging you to send her back to her family who has loved her dearly, cared for her, stood by her, and missed her all these years.

Sincerely,



Sherry Swiney  
Executive Director

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