



August 2020

Petition for Immediate Release of Client Submitted

We have submitted a petition to Gov. JB Pritzker and the Illinois Prisoner Review Board requesting the commutation of our client Jennifer's sentence or her immediate "compassionate release" due to the spike in COVID-19 cases in the IDOC facility where she is incarcerated. Jennifer's serious medical conditions put her at increased risk of illness or death if she were to contract the virus. She recently was transferred from a two-person to a four-person cell, increasing her further risk of exposure.

Jennifer was wrongfully convicted at age 19 of attempted robbery and murder on the theory of accountability – guilty of acts committed by others. She was pressured into providing a false "confession" after more than 14½ hours of police interrogation during which she was not given her necessary prescription medication. Despite the repeated confessions of people in an alternate suspect group, providing facts only the perpetrators would know and to two different police departments, Jennifer has spent over 18 years in prison fighting to prove her innocence.

Before the pandemic shut down prisons, IIP staff and students regularly visited Jennifer as part of our wellness initiative that offers emotional support and encouragement to clients through non-legal visits. Communicating through phone calls now, Jennifer said she feels like IIP staff and you, her supporters, are her "own crew of soldiers" fighting on her behalf.

We hope Gov. Pritzker will grant our request and release her immediately based on the strength of her innocence claim, her pre-existing health conditions and that she has never been a threat to society. In the meantime, our work to prove Jennifer's innocence through traditional legal avenues continues.

Student Spotlight: Kyrianna Johnston

Hometown: Clifton, IL

Majors: Psychology and Criminology/Criminal

Justice

IIP role: Former intern, current student worker

IIP projects: Social media, case evaluation, independent research on mammogram accessibility in prisons **UIS Graduation:** May 2021

What brought you to IIP?

Spring of my sophomore year at UIS I took IIP's class "Conviction of the Innocent." On the first day I went to the State Capitol to hear the press conference where IIP announced the posthumous exoneration of Grover Thompson. I knew how hard exonerations were and to get to see one was a really meaningful moment for me.

Why did you choose IIP for your internship?

I knew I would benefit from the importance the Project places on education, both in-office for students and outside by offering hands-on opportunities to interact with the justice system and the community. One of the most effective ways to get people to understand and support your mission/goals is to educate them with accessible and easy-to-understand information. Now that I'm finished with my internship, I've stayed on to help IIP educate others.

What inspired you to help build IIP's social media presence?

When I started my internship, I found IIP's social media posts were few and far between. Social media has become an important medium for not-for-profits, especially because it broadens an organization's reach. It offers a way to connect with the community and supporters, and share information about your mission and work.

Providing information is an important tool to utilize as ignorance surrounding the multitude of flaws in the system still persists. Additionally, because of social media's large reach, it allows us to connect supporters more personally with our goals and brings them in to help further IIP's mission and fight for changes in the system wherever they may be.

Where will you be studying this semester?

To keep my family safe, I will be attending UIS remotely and studying from Bradley, IL, in Kankakee County.

**Learn more about supporting our critical work
to free the innocent at: [Illinois Innocence Project](#).**