

STATEMENT OF GROUPS PARTICIPATING IN CLEMENCY PROJECT 2014

On January 30, 2014, Deputy Attorney General James Cole solicited the assistance of the nation's bar to help the Justice Department identify federal prisoners who, if sentenced today under current sentencing laws and policies, would likely have received a substantially lower sentence. In addition, Mr. Cole expressed the hope that attorneys would volunteer to assist potential candidates in assembling effective, appropriate and focused commutation petitions for consideration by the Department of Justice and the President.

In response, a number of organizations that have long worked for sentencing reform, including the Federal Defenders, the ACLU, FAMM, the ABA and NACDL have formed Clemency Project 2014. Each has expressed strong concerns that so few clemency petitions have been granted in recent years, and that countless meritorious petitions have either been denied or have languished without action. That said, the organizations each concluded that the Justice Department's public embrace of a robust approach to commutation reflects a genuine commitment to expedite the process and secure commutations for deserving individuals. Each of the organizations that have come together embraced this opportunity because it offers a path that will lead to relief for many who have suffered the injustice of unduly harsh sentences.

Clemency Project 2014 is designed to answer Mr. Cole's appeal to the bar. The groups are collaborating in this joint venture to help identify individuals who likely would have qualified for lower sentences if sentenced under current law and policies. Based upon statements by the Department of Justice, the project anticipates it will focus on prisoners who have a good prison record, no significant ties to organized crime, a non-violent history, and who are currently serving very lengthy sentences for relatively low-level offenses. Cases that appear to meet those standards will be referred to participating Federal Public Defenders and volunteer lawyers. Clemency Project 2014 will provide free training, support and resources for those lawyers to help ensure that the highest quality petitions are prepared and transmitted to the Department of Justice on an expedited basis.

While Clemency Project 2014 will focus on those cases that clearly fit the broad criteria described by the Deputy Attorney General, the groups stress that there are many other federal prisoners whose sentences are grossly disproportionate to the crimes for which they were convicted. The groups will continue to urge the Department of Justice and the President to vastly expand use of the clemency power to correct widespread injustice. Similarly, each organization participating in the Project supports legislative action to curtail sentencing laws that continue to cause unjust sentences.

For more information or for lawyers interested in volunteering for the project they may do so by writing to clemencyproject@nacdl.org