



Allissia Henz

Too many people in Arizona are serving long prison terms that don't make communities safer. There are plenty of people locked up who do not pose a risk to public safety yet languish in prison for decades, some of them seriously ill, like Allissia Henz. Arizona should give people like Allissia and her family a real chance for relief.

"I know I deserve to be in prison for my crime, but I don't deserve to die and be without my family." – Allissia Henz

2020 was hell for Allissia Henz. In February, almost five years into an 11-year sentence in an Arizona state prison, the 54-year-old was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer. That diagnosis was just the beginning of an incredibly tough journey of pain, medical incompetence, and heartbreak – with no relief in sight.

Adversity is not new to Allissia. As a child, she never knew her father. She was the victim of sexual assault when she was around 10, and she ran away from home when she was 12. As the years passed, she had problems with drugs and alcohol, which led to her offense and current



incarceration. Allissia stole money from 2006 to 2012 through a company credit card and company checks and pled guilty.

She has now been in prison for nearly seven years. Her daughter, Natasha Reyes, writes: “I know that it has broken her heart to have missed out on the time with her family, births, deaths, marriages, and graduations.”

After her cancer diagnosis, chemotherapy began in March 2020. In July of that year, Allissia had a hysterectomy, after which doctors discovered that the cancer had been misdiagnosed. Rather than ovarian cancer, she had the rarer peritoneal cancer.

By the end of October 2020, Allissia had had her appendix and the lining of her intestine removed, and a further three rounds of chemotherapy. She was then put on a two-year maintenance plan of chemotherapy pills. Since then, she has had further diagnoses: glaucoma, which could blind her, and a gene that makes breast cancer more likely, for which she needs a double mastectomy.

Through all of this, Allissia has not seen her family at all. The first of her eight rounds of chemotherapy coincided with the prison suspending visitors because of the pandemic. Heartbreakingly, she writes, “I have been without my family to hold and take care of me during this crucial time of my life.”

In 2019, only five individuals were recommended for clemency to the governor [of Arizona]. Three of them died before the governor took action.

Though she’s been without the physical presence of her loved ones, they have supported her from the outside by pushing to get her appropriate medical care. Her worried daughter Natasha describes the health care in the prison as “awful” and her treatment as “inhumane.” (Incidentally,



before her cancer diagnosis, Allissia complained of stomach problems for months and was just given laxatives. In January 2020, her stomach swelled, and the prison doctor diagnosed her condition as a blocked bowel. It was only after multiple members of Allissia’s family contacted the prison that she was taken to a hospital. She had five liters of fluid removed from her stomach, and that’s when she got her first cancer diagnosis.)

In Arizona, there exist two mechanisms through which early release can be granted: “medical clemency” and “executive clemency.” The criteria for both are very narrow, and both options are almost never used.

To be granted clemency for medical reasons, individuals must be in “imminent danger of death.” Arizona law confusingly defines “imminent” in three different ways depending on the specific authority: as three months, four months, or six months to live, under a professional medical assessment. The administrative process of application, consideration by a board, and then approval (or not) by the state governor takes time. In 2019, only five individuals were recommended for clemency to the governor. Three of them died before the governor took action.

Allissia applied for clemency in 2019 and was denied, and no reason was given for the denial. She applied again in 2020 and was denied because it was deemed that she wasn’t ill enough. As she puts it, “It was not granted because I’m not going to be dead in four months.” She is not allowed to apply again until September 2022.

Allissia is not trying to dodge punishment. “I know I deserve to be in prison for my crime ... but I just want to receive proper and adequate medical treatment to keep me alive.” If released, she plans to live with her 76-year-old mother, Connie Henz. Connie has her own medical problems, and the two want to care for each other.





Allissia also wants to help others avoid the mistakes she made. In her clemency application, she wrote: “I feel I can teach younger women better ways to live without co-dependency and teach them to be strong, confident, hard-working, successful women.” This desire to contribute to wider society matches up with her behavior in prison. She has worked throughout her time inside and undertaken a degree in business. She has also tried to bring people together within the prison community, helping set up classes in American Sign Language, English as a Second Language, and Spanish. She has no disciplinary tickets.

As her mother Connie wrote in her daughter’s clemency application, “My daughter needs to come home to her family now so she can be taken care of right.”



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The Facts:

Name: Allissia Henz

Sentence: 11 years

Offense: count 1: fraudulent schemes and artifices; count 2: forgery

Priors: Three prior felony convictions (theft)

Year sentenced: 2015

Age at sentencing: 49

Projected release date: June 2024



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