

URGENT REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Support the Clemency Petition of Tewkunzi Green



Tewkunzi, left, and her mother, Arleen, right

Tewkunzi Green is a domestic violence survivor who has been incarcerated for over 12 years. In 2007, her abusive boyfriend attacked her while she was holding their 6-month-old child in her arms. Medical records from the day of her arrest indicate that she had bruising on her neck from being strangled. But police and prosecutors did not believe that Tewkunzi, a Black woman originally from Mississippi, was the “real victim” in the relationship. Tewkunzi was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to 34 years.

Tewkunzi Green had been dating her boyfriend for almost two years when she became pregnant with their child. At first, he was happy about the pregnancy. But as the pregnancy progressed, it seemed almost as if he had grown jealous about sharing Tewkunzi’s attention. He had been abusive before, but during the pregnancy his abuse escalated. He was frequently verbally, physically, and sexually abusive to Tewkunzi. Following several incidents, the baby was born almost eight weeks premature and was hospitalized in the NICU for over a month.

On June 5, 2007, Tewkunzi’s boyfriend came home after work and accused Tewkunzi of talking to other men. He shoved her repeatedly in the side of the head. Since becoming pregnant, Tewkunzi had stayed in the relationship because she wanted her baby to grow up with his father there, and because she hoped that things would eventually get better. But that day, it seemed clear that her boyfriend was never going to change. Tewkunzi took the baby in her arms and told him that she was leaving. He responded that the only way she would be leaving the house was if she wasn’t breathing. He then blocked her exit. When Tewkunzi tried to call 911, he smacked the phone out of her hand, and it shattered on the floor. He then put his hands around her neck and shoved her back against the kitchen counter. In a panic, Tewkunzi grabbed a knife from the dish rack and stabbed him once. He loosened his grip on her and she fled to her mother’s house with her baby. He later died in the hospital from his injury.

At trial, Tewkunzi testified that her boyfriend was abusive to her, including that he would beat her with his fists when she would not have sex with him. She also testified that he was “choking” her on that day and that she believed, “he was tryin’ to take my life while my baby was in my arm.” Medical records and photos from the day of her arrest indicate that she had bruising on her neck from being strangled. Although she acted in self-defense, Tewkunzi has always felt remorse for her actions, saying at her own sentencing, “My heart was not to harm anybody.”

Tewkunzi’s Clemency Petition

Tewkunzi has exhausted all other legal remedies, and her attorney is now asking Governor Pritzker to exercise his power of executive clemency to commute Tewkunzi’s sentence to time served. Executive clemency is based in principles of mercy. Even though the legal system has rejected Tewkunzi’s claims of self-defense, the Governor can still decide that 34 years is too much time, given the circumstances of Tewkunzi’s case. Tewkunzi has been a model prisoner and a mentor and activist for domestic violence survivors during her 12+ years of incarceration.

How to Write a Letter of Support!

Letters of support can help to show the Governor that the general public believes that a commutation is appropriately merciful in this case. Letters of support can be from individuals or from organizations.

What to include in your letter:

- Address your letter** to Governor J. B. Pritzker, 100 W. Randolph St., Chicago, IL 60601. Open your letter with, "Dear Governor Pritzker."
- State clearly that you are writing in support of Tewkunzi Green's immediate release, or that your support her commutation to time served.**
- If you want, you can briefly share **information about yourself** such as your profession, if there is something that personally moves you about this case, or if you have personal or professional experience with the issues that Tewkunzi has dealt with in her life.
- If you have been a penpal** with Tewkunzi, sharing details about how long you've known Tewkunzi and what kind of person you know her to be is **especially helpful!**
- In your own words, very briefly explain **what you understand about Tewkunzi's case**, so that it is clear that you are familiar with the basic facts of the case. Just briefly!
- Explain **why you think Tewkunzi should be released**. You can also say if there's any reason why you feel personally moved by her story.
- Sign your letter and include your address.** Your address is included to verify your identity (i.e., that you are a real person), and may also show that you are a potential voter in Illinois.

More tips: It's okay for the letter to be handwritten, but please write legibly. Letters from the general public are usually kept to one page in length. You can still write a letter even if you do not live in Illinois. More than one person or organization can sign the same letter but please include your addresses. Write from the heart, don't overthink it.

SEND IT!

Letters received **before** midnight on **January 20th, 2020**, can be included in the petition itself. If you can get it here in time, please email it to RachelWhiteDomain@ccla.net or mail it to...

Attorney Rachel White-Domain
Cabrini Green Legal Aid
6 S. Clark St., Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60603

After Monday January 20th, 2020, letters can be mailed directly to Governor J.B. Pritzker at:
100 W. Randolph St., Chicago, IL 60601

