

## Crack the Disparity Coalition

### **THURSDAY PRESS TELECONFERENCE: Clinton Commutation Beneficiaries Call on President Obama to Expedite Clemency for Crack Cocaine Prisoners**

**Recent federal legislation reducing the 100-to-1 cocaine sentencing disparity will not benefit those in prison**

**Advocates will fast and pray for justice on December 22, 10-year anniversary of Clinton crack cocaine commutations**

WASHINGTON, DC—Advocates for presidential clemency will join together for a press teleconference on Thursday, December 16 to urge President Obama to expedite clemency for people serving excessive terms under the now-reformed federal crack cocaine sentencing laws. Participants will be commemorating the 10-year anniversary of President Clinton's commutation of Kemba Smith and Dorothy Gaines, two women sent to federal prison for 24 and 19 years, respectively, for playing peripheral roles in their boyfriends' drug operations. Joining the women on the press teleconference will be members of the Crack the Disparity Coalition, a broad coalition of civil rights, faith-based, drug policy, criminal justice reform advocacy groups, and formerly incarcerated people.

Recent changes under the Fair Sentencing Act, signed in August, reduce the sentencing disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine from 100-to-1 to 18-to-1 but do not provide relief to thousands of individuals who are already serving time for crack cocaine offenses. Prior to the law's passage, an individual in possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine (roughly the amount of sugar in a couple of sugar packets) would be sentenced to a federal 5-year mandatory minimum sentence. It took 500 grams of powder cocaine to receive the same 5-year sentence.

The campaign has set up a site ([http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/pres\\_obama-useyourpowertocorrectinjustice/](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/pres_obama-useyourpowertocorrectinjustice/)) and a Facebook page, "Holiday Fast and Prayer for Justice," (<http://www.facebook.com/#!/event.php?eid=173873379301719>) where others can commit to fasting and prayer and sign a petition to President Obama on behalf of those behind bars under the old crack cocaine sentencing structure.

**WHAT:** Press Teleconference to urge President Obama to expedite clemency

**WHEN:** Thursday, December 16, 1 p.m. ET

**CALL IN #:** contact Tony Newman for call in (646) 335-5384

**WHO:**

**Kemba Smith Pradia** was sentenced as a first time non-violent drug offender to 24.5 years in federal prison even though the prosecutor handling her case said she never handled, used or sold any of the drugs involved. Currently, she is a national public speaker, advocate and founder of the Kemba Smith Foundation.

**Dorothy Gaines** is a single mother of three who was convicted of minor involvement in her boyfriends' small-scale crack distribution and served 6 years of a 19 ½ year sentence before she was granted commutation. She currently works with at-risk youth in Mobile, AL.

**Hilary O. Shelton** is the Director of the NAACP's Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Policy. He played an integral role in the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and other policy measures affecting equality in our society.

**Margaret Love** was the former U.S. Pardon attorney under Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. She now represents people applying for executive clemency and advocates for sentencing and corrections reform.

Moderated by: **Nkechi Taifa**, the Senior Policy Analyst for the Open Society Foundations and Open Society Policy Center, focusing on issues of criminal justice and racial equality. She also convenes the Crack the Disparity Working Group of the Justice Roundtable, and has worked for over 17 years to eliminate the crack/powder disparity.