

Letter to Florida Officials Regarding Case Against Marissa Alexander

The following is a letter sent to Florida officials concerning the case of [Marissa Alexander](#).

October 29, 2013

Ms. Angela B. Corey, State Attorney
Fourth Judicial Circuit
Courthouse Annex
220 East Bay Street
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Dear State Attorney Corey:

The National Organization for Women (NOW) has long fought for the rights of women throughout the United States, seeking justice for those that have been victimized or discriminated against. We believe that both of these situations have occurred in the Marissa Alexander case. We know that it is within the power of state officials to correct the grave injustice that has occurred in this case. That is why we are asking that all assault charges against Alexander be dropped, that she be released immediately and that her conviction be vacated.

Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' law was designed to grant immunity from prosecution to individuals who use force, whether deadly or not, against persons that intend to inflict bodily harm upon them. Marissa Alexander's case is exactly the type of case for which the 'Stand Your Ground' law was designed. At the hands of her husband, Alexander experienced strangulation, beatings and hospitalization, including an incident that caused the premature birth of her youngest child. We believe Alexander met all of the requirements for the Stand Your Ground defense, and the decision to prosecute her was simply wrong – for Alexander, for her children and for victims of domestic violence throughout Florida. Anyone who understands the dynamics of intimate partner violence cannot help but be horrified that Alexander was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the justified act of protecting herself from, attack and where no one was injured.

Nor can we ignore the racist and sexist implications of this case. In testimony before the American Bar Association's National Task Force on Stand Your Ground Laws: Southeast Regional Public Hearing on Oct. 17, Aziza Botchway, Chair of the Miami-Dade Chapter of the National Congress of Black Women, Inc., summed up the problem:

Alexander was hurt by raced and gendered notions of what a "true victim" looks like. Alexander, like many black women similarly situated was caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place" in what Melissa Harris-Perry cites as the "crooked room" where

black women are forced to bend in order to compensate for the stereotypes and false narratives that they confront in the crooked room on a daily basis. To be empowered like Alexander is to confront the “strong black woman” and “angry black woman” narratives which sometimes work together to create an invisible, yet imprisoning “crooked room.” It goes something like this: Black women are strong and can or should handle anything. There is no way Alexander who just gave birth nine days ago to a baby who was born prematurely due to a beating by her abuser who outweighed her by 100 pounds and who threatened to kill her could have been in reasonable fear of imminent danger or severe bodily harm from her abuser.

Alexander was also caught by the unconsciousness yet pervasive “black woman breeder” narrative. That is, Alexander can and should take anything, even right after giving birth to her premature baby. Like slaves who were forced to return to work in the fields immediately after delivering babies, Alexander should have gone back to “normal” after delivering her baby prematurely. Alexander could have and should have fled even by jumping out of the window as the prosecutor actually, ludicrously argued. So what Alexander just had a baby nine days ago? So what – she’s not a victim, right?

In solidarity with Marissa and with advocates for women’s rights across the country, we urge you to correct this injustice. Free Marissa Alexander from prison and drop all charges against her so that she may be reunited with her family and begin the healing process.

Sincerely,

Terry O’Neill
President, National Organization for Women

cc:
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