



# Commute the Sentence of Rose McSwain

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On April 19, 1988, Rose McSwain found herself in a heated debate with a "John," whose sole purpose was to obtain sex from her at any cost. When it became apparent that forcible sex was his intention, Ms. McSwain fired two shots into the man, who later died from these wounds. Like many would do in a similar situation -- having no one to turn to -- she panicked and fled the state of Michigan. However, guilt over what she had done overwhelmed her and she returned to Michigan and promptly turned herself in to authorities.

The circumstances that brought Rose to that moment in 1988 will not be surprising to many. A dysfunctional and traumatic childhood, early motherhood, a "social safety net" full of holes, and ongoing dysfunction in her family of origin that did not make them a safe place to turn. Add to that a legal system that too often doesn't live up to its promise of equal protection and representation for BIPOC and the result was a sentence of LIFE without parole and two years for the firearm. Rose has served more than 30 years of that sentence, expressed deep remorse, and demonstrated efforts throughout her incarceration to better herself and contribute to the well-being of other prisoners.

These actions include: maintaining employment; routinely participating in AA/NA and using her story to help the younger, less experienced prisoners; counseling and therapy became second nature, and she slowly began to earn the respect of the prison administration; current work as a Prisoner Observation Aide, and helping those with mental challenges. Should her sentence be commuted, she plans to live with her daughter and continue to interact with troubled young women, helping them avoid a similar fate.

\*A commutation is a reduction of an individual's sentence. It does not nullify (remove) the underlying conviction.

*"I am not a difficult and hard person and I make no excuses for my actions; I take full responsibility for my behavior and I admitted my wrong doings. I know that [some] people feel I am not deserving of a chance and they have a right to their opinion. However, I know that compassion still exists and I continue to seek my freedom."*

*-- Rose McSwain*

**Michigan ranks 4th in the country in the number of women serving life without parole (173). Michigan also has one of the highest rates of Black women serving life without parole (one in 11 compared to the national average of one in 39).**

**-- The Sentencing Project**

