

Cravath Team Secures Parole for Incarcerated Survivor of Gender Violence

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At this year's Above & Beyond Awards, Sanctuary for Families will be honoring Cravath's David Stuart and Angel Valle for their trauma-informed advocacy and commitment to successfully helping "Monica," an incarcerated survivor of gender-based violence, to secure parole.

Parole preparation with an incarcerated survivor can facilitate incredibly meaningful moments in an attorney's pro bono work, should they take the opportunity and put in the work to bond with their client and truly work to understand their lived experiences. Cravath's David Stuart and Angel Valle certainly did this and more in the parole preparation they conducted with their client, "Monica," over the course of about a year. When Monica was granted parole and released after nearly 25 years of incarceration, "Team Monica," as she had taken to calling the pair of attorneys, drove up to meet her with supplies and to take her for her first meal outside prison in over two decades.

When Angel and David met Monica, she was incarcerated for the first-degree murder of her extremely abusive former husband. The physical abuse Monica experienced at the hands of her husband resulted in numerous hospitalizations. On one terrifying occasion, her husband put a gun to her head and pulled the trigger twice – only then did she learn that the gun had not been loaded. In addition to this severe trauma, Monica had already survived and witnessed extreme abuse from childhood and throughout her entire life. However, during her time in prison, Monica not only worked on unpacking and healing from this trauma but also consistently pushed herself to excel, taking over 20 classes and programs ranging from animal caretaking (Puppies Behind Bars) to faith-based learning (Women and the Bible) to doula training, while also working in the prison's law library.

Needless to say, Monica was traumatized from a lifetime of violence and victimization, including at the hands of the criminal legal system, and needed significant support and patience. As her legal team, David and Angel had two main tasks: to create a compelling parole packet for Monica and to prepare her for her long-awaited appearance before the Parole Board. As mentioned in a previous post, in New York State, incarcerated individuals are not entitled to legal

representation in their parole hearings. The onus falls entirely upon them to convey their remorse and rehabilitation, while simultaneously discussing a highly traumatic incident in their lives and responding to difficult questions from the Parole Board. Angel and David met with Monica to conduct mock hearings and were thrilled when they heard that her appearance before the Parole Board had been a success.

Reflecting on the experience, Angel notes, “Monica waited 25 years to tell her story to the Parole Board so it was important for her voice and perspective to drive the case. She was not just a client but a valued member of our team, contributing legal insight she gained from being incarcerated and from working in the law library. Since her release, Monica has remained a part of our team, visiting the Cravath office to share her experience and knowledge with the firm’s Incarcerated Women’s Initiative.”

“The Cravath team represented Monica with incredible enthusiasm and compassion. At every stage, they approached the case with both trauma-informed practice and zealous advocacy ... certainly ‘Above and Beyond’ in every sense.”

Ross Kramer
Director of Sanctuary’s Incarcerated Gender Violence Survivors Initiative

Sanctuary is thrilled to honor Angel and David for their outstanding legal abilities and dedication to their client.