

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, March 24, 2011

Contact: Andrea L. Fehring  
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
515 28th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50312  
Phone: 515-244-8028 ext. 312  
andrea@icadv.org

### **Governor Culver Brings Justice to Incarcerated Victims of Domestic Violence**

Des Moines – March 24, 2011 – The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Skylark Project are pleased to announce that, in his last days in office, Governor Culver continued working on behalf of victims of domestic violence by commuting the sentences of the following incarcerated victims of domestic violence: *(insert names as appropriate)*.

The Skylark Project, a program of ICADV, offers comprehensive services to incarcerated victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. The cornerstone of Skylark is commutation assistance. Skylark selects a limited number of women each year through a rigorous three phase screening process. Skylark provides intensive support and assistance in drafting their applications and practicing interview skills in preparation for their Board of Parole and Governor's Office interviews. ICADV supervises and matches law students from the University of Iowa College of Law with incarcerated battered women in an effort to facilitate successful completion of the commutation application process.

All of the women in the Skylark Project were severely battered. The battering played a crucial role in their crime. They all have had good disciplinary records while incarcerated. Many were not involved in the actual commission of the crime but were forced to assist their partner in

hiding evidence or were unable to stop their partner from committing the crime out of fear of being killed themselves. Several women were tried and convicted when evidence of domestic violence was not used or understood by the courts. They all were given long sentences. Several of the women have already served between 20 and 30 years in prison.

The Governor balanced the needs of the community, the impact on the crime victim's family, and the absence of justice at the trials of the commutation candidates. The women commuted by Governor Culver were not the primary actors, and their participation was coerced through violence. The impact of domestic violence on a victim requires the community to examine the complex and limited choices available to her, a process not typically undertaken at trial. In the end, the decision to commute a sentence is about justice and mercy. The Skylark Project and ICADV are very grateful that Governor Culver took this opportunity to act compassionately. Commuting the sentences of these women is a capstone to Culver's legacy on domestic violence: gun legislation SF2357, steady funding for all domestic violence programs, and Mari Culver's Shelter Day awareness campaign. By commuting the sentences of these victims of domestic violence, Governor Culver makes a powerful statement not only about the obligation we have to show victims of domestic violence mercy and justice but also the responsibility of elected officials to maintain services and support for the agencies that serve victims of domestic violence. In addition, Governor Culver sets a high bar for Governor-elect Branstad and the newly elected House and Senate.

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence seeks to engage all people in a movement to change the social and political systems that perpetuate violence against women. We do this

through education, advocacy, and quality victim services. Please contact ICADV at  
515.244.8028.

###