



## **NATIONAL NARCOTIC OFFICERS' ASSOCIATIONS' COALITION**

*455 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Box 112, Washington, DC 20001*

*Phone: (866) 803-8678*

*www.nnoac.com*

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### **A Case of Undeserved Clemency**

By Bob Bushman

While many consider Alice Johnson, the Cocaine Grandma, a "first time, non-violent offender", nothing could be further from the truth. Alice Johnson and her co-conspirators distributed several thousand kilograms of cocaine, worth millions of dollars, to countless victims over several years. While she may have had a change of heart during her time in prison, that only occurred after she was caught and incarcerated. It took her arrest, conviction and finally imprisonment to bring her to that realization.

No, Alice Johnson was not a first time offender. When she was finally convicted, that was not for her first crime. The truth is, Alice Johnson committed hundreds of crimes during her drug dealing career. I know this because I have read her indictment and the Appeals Court decision that affirmed her convictions. I would encourage you to do the same before forming an opinion as to the level of her criminal behavior.

Alice Johnson describes herself as "a telephone mule", probably in reference to the thousands of calls that went to her phones during the course of the drug trafficking conspiracy for which she was convicted. The Appeals Court review of her case cites specific instances where she provided leadership and substantial assistance to the conspiracy - thousands of phone calls, renting properties to assist with the trafficking operation, purchasing vehicles for transporting drugs, warning other co-conspirators to help them avoid arrest, taking delivery of cocaine and making payments for it to the Columbian Cali Cartel. And then there's the money laundering - millions of dollars.

There were no honest mistakes made. Alice Johnson committed those crimes willingly. She justified her involvement in drug trafficking because of a broken marriage, a death in the family and hard financial times. Millions of Americans experience those same tragedies, yet they do not turn to criminal activity or prey on their neighbors and community the way Alice Johnson did. It is not right to absolve her of the responsibility for consciously, carelessly and callously peddling poison to so many people, seeking their ruin for her personal benefit and gain. How many lives will we let a drug dealer destroy before they are considered to be deserving of a life sentence in prison?

I understand the broad scope of Alice Johnson's criminal activity, but why can't the media or the pundits that have lauded her release? Their mischaracterization and acceptance of her criminal activity is shameful. Why won't they take a close look at the facts of this case before they parade Alice Johnson out onto the podium as one who has fallen victim to our justice system? To downplay or excuse her criminal conduct is a hard slap in

the face to those who became addicted to her poison, who lost their physical and mental health, financial security and the love of family.

We should all be demanding justice for the people who lost their lives to drug abuse and addiction because of the selfish greed of Alice Johnson and her drug dealing cohorts. While Alice Johnson now gets a "second chance" to live a life of freedom and to be reunited with her family, her victims' families have nothing to rejoice about. None of them will get a second chance or any reunification. Though many of them never committed any crimes, they are serving life sentences for which there is no commutation because Alice Johnson's drugs ruined their lives.

I cannot judge Alice Johnson's heart. That is up to a higher power. But I can demand, as should you, that people like her, who bring so much death, destruction and misery upon our society be held fully accountable for their crimes. I do not accept for a minute that Alice Johnson deserves anything less than to serve every day of the life sentence she earned for destroying so many lives and robbing those people of their futures, while also devastating their families and communities. A sentence of life in prison comes nowhere close to paying the debt she owes to the families of all of those who became addicted to her drugs or who died in the wake of her drug dealing business.

Elected officials need to do more to protect our communities from the tragic consequences of drug abuse and violent crime. Granting sentence commutations, reducing penalties for drug and violent crimes and prohibiting enforcement of drug laws have only made drug abuse and crime problems worse. Rather than caving to the demands of convicted criminals and their sympathizers who do not respect our laws, a higher priority should be to support law enforcement's efforts to protect our law-abiding citizens and their families from becoming the next victims of the drug epidemic that is devastating our country and killing so many Americans.

***( Bob Bushman is the President of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition (NNOAC). The NNOAC represents 60,000 members from State Narcotic Officers' Associations and several partner organizations as they monitor and engage in policy issues regarding drug law enforcement and other criminal justice and public safety initiatives.)***

Contact Bob Bushman  
bbushman@nnoac.com  
Phone: 202-417-3931