

Gladys D. Wilson, 157538
Parole eligible since 1988
Paroled Dec. 6, 2005

Although her 1978 guilty plea was designed to permit release in 10 years, her institutional record was exceptional, she would not receive a life sentence today and the parole board repeatedly showed interest in releasing her, Wilson was not paroled until 2005.

In 1978, Gladys Wilson was the 31-year old mother of an 11-year-old girl. She had worked at the same marital and financial problems. When Jerry decided to rob a Berrien County grocery store, Wilson agreed to leave him there and pick him up later, after the store had closed. She had no idea Jerry would kill the young night manager.

Charged with aiding and abetting felony-murder, Wilson cooperated with the police in her husband's prosecution. She was allowed to plead guilty to aiding and abetting armed robbery. Although sentenced to parol-



Gladys Wilson

able life, everyone involved assumed she would not serve much more than 10 years. This assumption was confirmed in 1982 when the board calculated Wilson's grid term at 10 years. Her defense attorney later explained in an affidavit:

There has always been consensus among the people familiar with all the details of the case

that Mrs. Wilson was far less culpable than her husband. For her to spend her entire life in prison, just as he will, would not only be grossly unjust, but would wholly negate the benefit she was supposed to derive from her plea bargain.

Under today's sentencing guidelines, Wilson's recommended minimum sentence would be between 9 and 15 years.

As early as 1983, staff reported Wilson to be cooperative, mature and self-disciplined, and suggested that she should be given "early consideration" for release. A 1985 report stated that she "is well-respected by both prisoners and staff" and that she "has an excellent attitude and has attempted to make the best of a bad situation." She has received only one misconduct citation in all the years of her incarceration.

Wilson took full advantage of the programming available to her in prison and has been placed in numerous positions of responsibility. She earned 67 college credits with a cumulative grade point of 3.7. She also obtained a paralegal certificate. She has worked as a resident aide in a protective environment for mentally and physically impaired inmates, as a lab technician in the prison clinic, as a teacher's aide, tutor and administrative assistant. For several years, she served as trustee of an inmate trust fund and she volunteered to help set up and run the law library at Camp Gilman. For many years she served as the class representative in a lawsuit aimed at improving conditions in the women's prisons.

In 1986, the parole board confirmed its intent to release Wilson when she had served 10 years. It requested that she be transferred so she could spend her last year in minimum custody. In February 1987, Wilson was moved to Camp Gilman. A year later the board voted to begin the parole process

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under the lifer law. Wilson waited, but the board took no further action. When her family contacted the board for information, they were told that the board was overburdened and that lifers had been put "on the back burner." Finally, in May 1992, the parole board wrote that it would begin actively processing her case in the next few months. Although nothing more was done before the board was reconstituted in October 1992, after reviewing Wilson's file in 1993, the new board also voted to proceed to a public hearing.

All consideration stopped when the successor judge objected to Wilson's parole "until she had served 20 years." The board notified Wilson that it would not review her again until 1998. Having spent six years in a minimum custody prison camp waiting for release, Wilson was transferred back to a secure facility because parole was no longer imminent.

In 1998, when Wilson had completed 20 years, the board did not recontact the sentencing court. After one member conducted a routine interview, the board simply notified her that it had "no interest."

Wilson was interviewed next in April 2003. By then the successor judge, persuaded that Wilson had served more than enough time for her role in the offense, had written to the board strongly urging her release. Wilson believed she might finally be freed to live in Virginia with her daughter and grandchildren. However, in October the board notified her that, once again, it had no interest.

Wilson's health had started to decline. In the spring of 2004 she spent several days hospital-

ized in intensive care before being diagnosed as an insulin-dependent diabetic. Originally, she was to be reconsidered in 2008 when she would have been 61 years old. In 2005, however, the parole board agreed to reconsider Wilson and decided to parole her. She was released on Dec. 6, 2005 and discharged from parole on Dec. 6, 2009.