

WHY IS SHARON RICHARDSON STILL IN PRISON?

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Should a battered woman convicted of conspiring to murder
her abusive boyfriend be granted clemency?

By Kristal Brent Zook

Sharon Richardson is in jail for murder and conspiracy. And a growing number of legal advocates, elected officials and community leaders think she should be allowed to go free. Convicted of conspiring to kill her boyfriend, Jeffrey Bridges, in May 1990, she has served 14 years of a 20-to-life sentence at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in upstate New York. But Richardson's story is not quite that simple. For one thing, she was an abused woman, battered in body and spirit by the man she is convicted of murdering. For another, she did not actually wield the knife that ended Bridges's life. That gruesome deed was done by Dwayne Mitchell, a young acquaintance of the couple, who—along with Richardson and three teens—was sent to prison in connection with the murder. But while Mitchell confessed, served 12 years and was paroled in May 2002, Sharon Richardson, now 44, has maintained her innocence, yet is still doing time.

Since her incarceration, she has been a model prisoner. She has a stack of certificates attesting to her accomplishments in baby and adolescent care, AIDS counseling and group-therapy sessions. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 168]

NATHANIEL WELCH