

Inmate's sentence questioned

Women's groups say Lisa Neve is not a dangerous offender

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Lisa Neve was wrongly classified as a dangerous offender based on "myths and bias" relied on by male psychiatrists, say a coalition of women's groups.

The four national groups asked the Alberta Court of Appeal Monday to allow them to participate in Neve's appeal later this year.

They believe they can bring a perspective to the hearing about the real lives of women such as Neve that was absent from her court case.

The groups include the Elizabeth Fry Society, the Women's Legal Education Fund, the Disabled Women's Network Canada and the Native Women's Association of Canada.

The court reserved its decision Monday about whether to give the women's groups and the Alberta Civil Liberties Association intervenor status.

Appeal Court Justice Anne Russell said a written decision will be issued in the near future.

Neve, 23, has had a continual record of crime since she was 15.

She had repeated convictions for uttering threats, forcible confinements, assaults with weapons, break and enters, and assaults causing bodily harm. She is now imprisoned for threatening the life of a lawyer and his children.

In November 1994, Justice Alex Murray declared Neve a dangerous offender and sentenced her to an indefinite prison term. Her first application for parole was denied earlier this year.

Neve's lawyer, Brian Beresh, supported both applications to take part in the appeal hearing. But Justice Harold Irving questioned whether they could add anything of relevance.

"What are they going to say that you can't say?" he asked Beresh. "You've never been at a loss for words."

Doreen Sulyma, representing the women's groups, said they can bring special knowledge and expertise on women in conflict with the law.

Neve has a far less serious criminal record than most of the more than 100 male dangerous offenders, Sulyma said.

The women's groups are justified

in raising constitutional issues about equality rights because it was impossible to know they were being ignored during the trial until Murray rendered his judgment, she said.

Lawyer Shirish Chotalai said the Alberta Civil Liberties Association is only seeking the right to make a short written submission on one issue. Its brief is on what general principles and guidelines a judge should follow in a dangerous offender application.

Crown prosecutor Ken Tjosvold asked the court to reject the applicants. All their issues should have been brought up at the trial or will be addressed at the appeal by Beresh, he said.

Only two other Canadian women have been declared dangerous offenders.

Last November, Wendy Lee Sawatsky, 44, who has been convicted of manslaughter, arson and assault was found to be a dangerous offender.

Marlene Moore, who killed herself in the Kingston Prison for Women in 1988, was declared Canada's first female dangerous offender in 1985.