

Sisters' plea: Send our brother home

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Two sisters of accused cocaine importer Dan Latini, who has AIDS, have appealed to Bermuda to let their brother go home to die.

In a letter to *The Royal Gazette*, New York residents Mrs. Leona Saucedo and Mrs. Dolores Pizzo told how Latini was given six months to live in April, and had come to Bermuda in search of a cure for the fatal disease.

They asked Government to treat the cases of Latini and his friend Mark Haslam, also charged with cocaine importation, with compassion.

"Dan is terminally ill from the AIDS virus and had hoped this new and controversial treatment would result in a cure," they wrote.

"His close and dear friend, Mark, is also dying of AIDS. Due to the severity of this unique situation we are sincerely requesting the Bermuda Government treat this case with consequent compassion and release our brother and his friend Mark to spend their final days with their families," they wrote.

"This act of justice would easily outweigh any penal conviction on two people already doomed to die."

The sisters said they had heard "horror stories" about Latini's prison confinement: "Fortunately his hospital residency has proved a foundation for mental and physical improvement."

"At this stage the social judgement of guilty or not guilty is far from identifying the existential and true avenue of real justice. The justice for us now lies in the arena of Christian and human compassion."

Mrs. Pizzo said from New York yesterday Latini's arrest had shocked the family, who knew him as a "good person".

Mrs. Pizzo said the family had been born and raised in New Jersey. Although close to her brother, she had not seen him for seven years.

"We are so sorry to hear of our brother this way. We just want him home with us for his last days," she said.

She also asked a Catholic priest be allowed to visit her brother.

The sisters' letter has been forwarded to the Health and Social

Services Department for consideration.

The Minister, the Hon. Quinton Edness, is off the Island but a Department spokesman said the letter would be looked at.

The set procedure in such cases is to inform the Prisons Department and have the chief medical officer make some recommendations regarding the condition of the prisoner.

The matter would then be passed on to the Governor who would make the decision on whether or not to allow Latini to return to America.

The spokesman said Latini was not eligible for a "release on licence" — which is essentially parole — because he had not yet been convicted.

The spokesman said to his knowledge there had not yet been any serious discussion concerning Latini's case.

He said Latini would have ample access to a priest.

STAR's executive director, Mrs. Chris Atcheson, said Bermuda had no special new or controversial treatment for AIDS.

She said anything to fight the disease available on the Island was also available in the US.

Mrs. Atcheson said STAR was visiting Latini and Haslam. She said STAR realised how difficult it was for the two men to cope with the disease in the absence of family and friends.

She said Latini, who is in hospital, had a positive attitude and was facing up to his crisis well.

She said STAR was only concerned with the care of the two men, and would not become involved in the legalities of their alleged crimes.

Haslam, who is in Casemates, was not yet suffering any ill effects from the disease, she said.

Haslam appeared in Magistrates' Court yesterday represented by Mr. Tim Marshall. Latini was too ill to attend.

Mr. Marshall asked that if Latini was unable to attend the trial, Haslam's case proceed by itself.

Acting Senior Magistrate the Wor John Judge, who noted Latini had not obtained any legal representation, adjourned the matter for mention for July 18.

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