

Leonard Peltier: ‘I hope I make it to June 10’

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Advocates say June parole hearing may be Leonard Peltier’s last chance at freedom and they plan to push hard for his release

RAPID CITY, S.D. – At 80 years old, Leonard Peltier is approaching what may be his last attempt at freedom.

On June 10, the Anishinaabe elder will participate in what may be his final parole hearing. Peltier is currently serving two consecutive life sentences after being convicted of killing two FBI agents in 1975 at the Jumping Bull Ranch in South Dakota.

Peltier is asking for the public to spread the word about his parole hearing, said Dawn Lawson, secretary of the Leonard Peltier Ad Hoc Committee.

“For a long time, people have been dying in that prison and the (Federal Bureau of Prisons) is out of control,” Lawson said. “They’re (U.S. Penitentiary Coleman 1) currently on indefinite lockdown, not because anybody has done anything, just because they can. They (prisoners) are living in their own filth. Leonard is making an appeal to his people to please get anybody’s attention.”

In the past few months, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa citizen’s health has taken a turn for the worse, so much so that his attorneys say they’re concerned he won’t make it to the June parole hearing.

“He didn’t sound good when I spoke with him on the phone today (April 22), he doesn’t even know if he’s going to make it to next week,” said Nick Tilsen, Oglala Lakota and CEO of the NDN Collective. “He told me, ‘I hope I make it to June 10, and I hope I can make it 30 days after that.’”

Peltier has been struggling with health concerns for years. He’s had trouble managing his diabetes while incarcerated, experienced the loss of vision in one eye, had open heart surgery, an aortic aneurysm, and is dealing with the lingering effects of contracting COVID-19.

On April 16, the Leonard Peltier Ad Hoc Committee issued a press release and

organized a calling campaign to urge federal prison officials to address Peltier's health problems. Since then, Peltier's lead attorney, Jenipher Jones, was able to arrange for a doctor outside the prison to meet with Peltier twice.

The medical visit revealed Peltier was experiencing eye damage and would need to see a specialist, but prison officials said it would take 8 to 10 months to coordinate such a visit.

In February, Judith LeBlanc, executive director of the Native Organizers Alliance, requested the U.S. Department of Justice approve the compassionate release of Peltier based on his health problems. Compassionate release is available for prisoners who seek early release due to extraordinary or compelling circumstances, according to the [American Bar Association](#).

"At a time when democratic values are being challenged, DOJ should take action as he nears the end of his life and allow him to return to his family on his ancestral homeland," LeBlanc said in a statement. "We implore the DOJ to grant Peltier's compassionate release."

Tilsen called on the Biden administration to take action.

"This administration, the Biden Administration, has said that Native American rights are a priority to them, and yet they've got the longest sitting Indigenous political prisoner locked up and we've seen no action from the federal government," Tilsen said. "If he dies in prison this will forever be a part of that administration's legacy as it relates to Native people."

Tilsen said he's been fighting for Peltier's freedom since he was a small child. Now, his organization is on the front lines of Peltier's fight.

"It's all hands on deck," Tilsen said. "With the right medical treatment Leonard could live for a while, but without it he's almost guaranteed to not make it."

With the announcement of Peltier's parole date, NDN Collective is switching gears from putting its energy toward compassionate release for Peltier and instead educating the public on his push for parole.



Leonard Peltier at the U.S. Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kan. Peltier, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, is now at a prison in Florida and is set to appear before a parole board on June 10, 2024.

A chance to tell his story

Within 30 days after the June 10 parole hearing, the parole commission will issue its decision. A recommendation will be delivered to the commission for a final decision to be made.

Since Peltier is a federal prisoner serving a sentence of 30 years or more, he is eligible for a parole hearing within 9 months of his eligibility date as determined by the Bureau of Prisons. This hearing may be his only shot.

"The parole hearing on June 10 is the most important parole hearing of Leonard's life," Tilsen said. "He won't live long enough for another parole hearing to come around."

[Source: ICT](#)

