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Pregnant Mother May Be Freed Friday

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A public outcry has prompted the Samara Regional Court to move up to Friday a hearing in the case of Yulia Kruglova, a pregnant mother of four who was jailed in July and is seeking early release.

Kruglova, 36, was convicted of embezzling 16 million rubles ($520,000) as head of the Tolyatti branch of a Dutch-owned insurance company, Oranta.

She was sentenced to three years in prison, but both the prosecution and defense have asked to waive or suspend the sentence under a legal provision allowing leniency for mothers of underage children.

The appeals hearing, initially scheduled for Sept. 17, was moved to Friday because Kruglova is to undergo a Caesarean section on Sept. 20, Svetlana Bakhmina, a former Yukos lawyer who is spearheading a campaign to free Kruglova, said Thursday.

Bakhmina, herself a mother of young children who was denied leniency when jailed on politically tinged charges in 2006, said on her LiveJournal blog that it meant the case would receive less coverage because media may not be aware of date change.

An Irkutsk court in August suspended for 14 years a three-year prison sentence handed to a local official's daughter, who killed a pedestrian in a road accident, because she had a newborn son.

Children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov, who has supported the campaign to free Kruglova, will meet the Samara Regional Court's chief judge, Lyubov Drozdova, and Tolyatti prosecutor Rashid Badalov “in the nearest future” to discuss ways to soften Kruglova's sentence, Astakhov's office said in a statement Thursday. Astakhov told The Moscow Times on Wednesday that he would travel to the region next week.

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