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Tolokonnikova Asks for Release on Parole

By Anya Aseeva

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Tolokonnikova at the Tagansky District Court last year. **Denis Bochkarev**

Jailed Pussy Riot band member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, who is serving a two-year term at a penal colony in Mordovia, has asked for an early release on parole, Kommersant reported Thursday.

Tolokonnikova's lawyer, Irina Khrunova, filed a petition on Wednesday with the Zubovo-Polyansky District Court of Mordovia asking for her client's release on parole.

The petition said that Tolokonnikova is positively regarded by her community at home and in prison and has no conflicts with her inmates or with the prison's administration.

"Apart from that, she has a young child, she is sociable, and will be employed immediately upon her release," Khrunova said.

According to her, the management of Novaya Gazeta is willing to hire Tolokonnikova as

a columnist, and Marat Guelman, a gallery owner, as well as a number of drama schools, have also expressed interest.

Tolokonnikova is eligible to apply for parole because she has served half of her two-year sentence, though prison violations can be used to reject parole appeals.

Last week, she was placed in solitary confinement for 15 days for going to the prison's medical center without being accompanied by a guard. Supporters said the move was meant to prevent her from winning early release.

Pyotr Verzilov, Tolokonnikova's husband, said her appeal will be reviewed no earlier than April.

"Formally, Nadezhda can be released now, but it is clear that without a public campaign she won't succeed," Verzilov told Kommersant."Starting March 8, there will be a series of pickets attended by prominent public figures outside the Federal Penitentiary Service building in Moscow."

Maria Alyokhina, who is also serving a two-year prison sentence in a minimum security facility in Berezniki, will appeal next week for release on parole, Khrunova said.

Alyokhina has fewer chances to win, Khrunova said, because she has successfully appealed only two of four penalties imposed on her by the Federal Penitentiary Service.

International human rights groups have spoken out in support of the activists' early release.

"The Russian authorities should immediately release the members of the punk group, as each day of their stay in prison is a manifestation of lawlessness," said Rachel Denber, deputy director of the Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch.

Tolokonnikova, Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich were found guilty of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred for their performance of an anti-Kremlin song in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral in February 2012.

Samutsevich was freed in October, but the two others were sent to prison colonies to serve two-year sentences.

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