

City human rights commission calls for shorter sentence for anarchist

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Eugene, Ore. (AP) - Members of the Eugene Human Rights Commission have written a letter in support of a reduced prison sentence for an anarchist now serving a 22-year prison term for setting three sport utility vehicles on fire and attempting to burn down an oil company.

Commission members say people convicted of more serious crimes than those of Jeffrey "Free" Luers have received more lenient sentences. "In no way are we supporting him or his crime," said Sara Rich, a commission member who researched the case and urged the commission to question whether the sentence was based on political beliefs.

"During these difficult times, we must work diligently to ensure that the basic civil rights of all of our fellow citizens are equally protected and upheld," the letter states. "We therefore urge Mr. Luers to use his appeal process in the hope that a review of his sentence will lead to a reduction in time served and with the expectation that the length of his sentence would not be based on his political beliefs."

The letter does not commit the city to take any action on Luers' behalf, but is intended for Luers to use in any way he wishes, Rich said. The letter does not mention Luers' conviction for attempted arson of a fumed-filled tanker truck at an oil company in a Whiteaker residential area that investigators believe could have been catastrophic. Luers disavows any connection with the crime.

Luers, 24, was convicted for 10 felonies including three counts of first-degree arson at the Romania truck dealership on June 16, 2000, and two counts of attempted arson at the Tyree Oil Inc. three weeks earlier.

He is appealing the sentence, arguing the crimes were not first-degree arson, the sentences should not be served back-to-back, and that he was sentenced as though someone had been seriously injured or endangered. No one was injured in either incident.

Luers' co-defendant, Craig Andrew Marshall, 30, made a plea deal on charges in the Romania case and was sentenced in November 2000 to 5 1/2 years in prison. Although the case began three years ago, vocal supporters continue to press Luers' cause. They have organized a demonstration for Saturday at a Eugene park and have created a Web site.