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California Innocence Project seeks clemency for 11 inmates

By **LYLE MORAN**,
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A judge approved Michael Hanline's release from prison in November after he served 34 years of a life sentence for a murder in Ventura County he did not commit.

Hanline, believed to be the longest-serving wrongfully incarcerated person in state history, was the first of 12 people to secure his freedom from a list of those for whom the California Innocence Project has sought clemency.

Staff from the project, family of the remaining members of the "California 12" and supporters gathered Monday at California Western School of Law to raise awareness about efforts to free the others.

"One down, 11 to go," said Justin Brooks, director of the California Innocence Project. "We are not done until we are done."

Brooks said the list was made up of cases in which there was compelling evidence of innocence, but his team was running out of legal remedies they could pursue in the courts.

That is why the project, a clinical program at California Western, has asked Gov. Jerry Brown to grant clemency for the rest, most of whom have spent more than 15 years in prison.

"If the governor looks at them, he will see there is strong evidence of factual innocence, they have been in prison a long time and there were problems with their trials and procedures," Brooks said.

Evan Westrup, a spokesman for the governor, said in a statement: "While we do not comment on individual cases, we've had a number of conversations with the Innocence Project and its materials are being reviewed."

As part of Monday's events, some of those present were scheduled to walk from downtown to Ocean Beach to commemorate a 712-mile march the Innocence Project led two years ago from San Diego to Sacramento.

The goal of the previous Innocence March was also to raise awareness about the California 12, and it concluded with members of the Innocence Project meeting with officials from Brown's staff.

Attendees at Monday's commemoration wore shirts depicting a license plate on the front that said "XONR8" and "Free the CA 12" on the back.

Darleen Long of Corona, whose daughter Kimberly Long is one of the 11 remaining members on the clemency list, was among those who addressed the crowd before the walk.

Kimberly Long was convicted of the 2003 murder of her boyfriend, despite viable alternative suspects and thin evidence against her, according to the Innocence Project.

Long was sentenced to 15 years to life and has been imprisoned for six years.

Her mother — who wore a black shirt that said "Actually factually innocent" on the front and "Free Kimberly Long" on the back — urged those in the crowd to do everything they could to support the Innocence Project's efforts to help her daughter and others receive clemency.

"We have an injustice and we need to push that injustice," said Darleen Long, 68. "We want our children home."

The families of Ed Contreras and Guy Miles, two other members of the California 12, were also present Monday.

Contreras is incarcerated for a Los Angeles County murder despite the recantation of the prosecution's key witness; Miles is incarcerated for a robbery in Orange County after a witness is believed to have misidentified him and others have confessed to the crime.

Mabel Miles, Guy's mother, said she is grateful for the California Innocence Project's work on her son's case and its other activities.

"They have been such a wonderful help in just helping us get the attention regarding his case, otherwise I don't know what we would have done," said Mabel Miles, 71.

One man who was freed after more than a dozen years in prison for a rape he was wrongfully convicted of said he hopes to join the efforts to assist the California 12 and others like them.

Herman Atkins, who was released in 2000, said he is studying at California Western to be a defense attorney with the California Innocence Project.

"I want to help others get out," Atkins told the crowd.

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