

266 Merrimon Avenue
Asheville, NC 28801
1 February 20155

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain:

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh.

As you know, in November 2014, Rasmea was convicted of Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization. Compassion in her sentencing will serve justice in this case. She was detained for a month immediately following the verdict, including almost 3 weeks in solitary confinement, which was extremely difficult for her.

As a survivor of torture, engagement for the betterment of her community in Chicago is critical to her emotional health; the isolation she endured while incarcerated was a great hardship and may have retriggered her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Also, as a 67-year old woman, her health suffered under the cold, damp, and uncomfortable conditions in the St. Clair County Jail, as they surely would in any facility lacking medical services and accommodations to provide for senior citizens.

If Rasmea loses her appeal, she will likely lose her citizenship and face deportation. This will end life as she knows it, cutting all her ties with family and community in Chicago. This punishment alone is so devastating, it should not be compounded by adding a prison term.

Since there is a possibility of her conviction being overturned on appeal, keeping her out of prison would allow her to continue as a contributing and productive person, doing the work that is so critical to hundreds of immigrant and refugee women in Chicago's Arab and Muslim community.

Rasmea is an award-winning leader of Chicago's immigrant community who has dedicated 50 years of her life to serving refugees wherever she has lived. In Chicago, she built the Arab Women's Committee, with some 600 members. Because of Rasmea's work, immigrant and refugee women who came to the US from countries facing war and political crises – like Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and beyond – now have a place to seek support, gain empowerment and community, and call their home.

Throughout her life Rasmea has been a responsible, contributing member of society, and deserves to be set free to regain her health and continue this important work. I therefore urge you to grant her appeal and be extremely lenient in your sentencing of her.

Respectfully yours,

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