

February 9, 2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency in your sentencing of Ms. Rasmea Odeh on March 12th. I came to know of Ms. Odeh in her work with the Arab American Action Network, (AAAN) and her reputation as a respected community leader in Chicago. AAAN is a member organization of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), a statewide immigrant advocacy organization of which I am the executive director.

While I do not know Ms. Odeh very well on a personal level, many people that I hold in high regard have the utmost respect for her, her work, and the many people she has touched through her service. Her contributions go beyond the Arab and Muslim communities. She has influenced the broader immigrant rights, women's rights, and social justice movements in Chicago.

ICIRR has partnered with AAAN for over a decade not only for the push for immigration reform and immigrant-friendly state policies, but also to inform communities about a range of issues from the Census, to health care, to citizenship. Ms. Odeh has played a significant role in the partnership. Her accomplishments are directly related to the trust and respect she earned through many years of serving, caring, and simply being there for program participants and people who needed her.

Ms. Odeh has overcome many setbacks earlier in her life, and endured unspeakable things including torture. Rather than becoming another statistic, she chose to dedicate the past 50 years of her life to serving refugees wherever she has lived. And, 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.

I hope these decades of service are not lost upon your deliberations in her case.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lawrence Benito
1454 E. 63rd St.
Chicago, IL 60637

