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Judge Gershwin Drain
Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse
231 W. Lafayette Blvd., Room 123
Detroit, MI 48226

The Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain:

I write to request leniency in the pending March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh. I am an associate professor of Classics and World Religions at Ohio University currently on research leave at the Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago.

I have known Rasmea for nearly a decade. In 2011, I interviewed her about her work with Arab immigrant women for a book I am writing on Chicago's Palestinian community. During that interview and in multiple subsequent interactions, Rasmea has facilitated further interactions with some of the women who participate in her program. These women demonstrate deep love and respect for Rasmea, invariably describing to me how Rasmea has enabled them to gain a foothold in Chicago as they undergo the difficult process of starting new lives in the United States.

Rasmea is a 67-year-old woman who has had to endure torture in Israeli military prisons and nearly a month of punishing solitary confinement in the St. Claire County jail following her conviction in November 2014 on a charge of unlawful procurement of naturalization. She suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Further incarceration will only serve to traumatize her further. Should Rasmea lose her appeal, she might well be stripped of her US citizenship and forced to undergo deportation, an event that will destroy the life she has worked so hard to build in Chicago. Deportation will be punishment enough. Her appeal, however, might succeed, so I ask that she be allowed to remain free to live and work in Chicago, continuing to provide important leadership to the women she has done so much to help.

Regardless of her conviction, Rasmea has proven to be an exemplary citizen, winning awards for her work in Chicago. She has suffered enough. Does not society have a countervailing interest in helping immigrants to establish strong institutions and productive lives? The law must be served, but there are also considerations of mercy and recognition of a larger social good that should temper how we choose to enforce legal strictures.

I urge you to consider leniency in the sentencing of Rasmea Odeh.

Respectfully,

Loren D. Lybarger

