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Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmia Odeh, who I know as a deeply respected and relied on community leader. As a American Jewish activist and member of California Coalition for Women Prisoners, Rasmia's work and commitment has inspired and been a compass in my work on peace and justice in Palestine and civil and human rights more broadly.

Rasmia is someone who deserves the appreciation and respect of the people and the government of the United States. She is a recognized 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 Rasmia'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.

As a founder of Generation Five, an organization dedicated to preventing and responding to child sexual abuse, and one-time board member of the San Francisco Women Against Rape, I am very familiar with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One of the most common experiences of those who have experienced the kind of trauma that Rasmia did as a survivor of torture and rape by the Israeli military is to compartmentalize information, memories and experiences. It is not at all surprising to me that when asked on her naturalization forms whether or not she was ever incarcerated that she replied "no." It would not be uncommon for someone with a traumatic memory of detainment to block a question that may force blocked or compartmentalized memories of profound trauma to the surface.

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. Furthermore, I know from my work that one of the most important components of healing from such trauma is the ability to help others who have experienced similar experiences. Her work on behalf of her community is not only essential to those she serves, but also for her health and well-being.

If Rasmia 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.

Please do the right and compassionate thing and grant Rasmia Odeh leniency.

Respectfully yours,

*Sara Kershner*

