

475 14th Street, Suite 800
Oakland, CA 94612
6. February.2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, who I know as remarkable community leader. My name is Tracy Benson and I work for the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY). CJNY is a national network of over 150 community based organizations that work with children and families impacted by the juvenile justice system. We stand in solidarity with Rasmea Oden and her legacy of service and advocacy. Prior to CJNY, I worked for Freedom Inc, a Southeast Asian and African American organization in Madison, WI that does anti-violence against women work.


I know of Rasmea and her great work through a trusted, long time member organization, the Arab American Action Network. Rasmea and AAAN's work has been critical in supporting immigrant women and families across Chicago and beyond. 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.

Having worked with Southeast Asian refugee women for over a decade, I know how critical the support is that Rasmea has provided to families coming to the US from countries facing war and political crisis- like Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and beyond. These women now have a place to seek support, gain empowerment and community, and call their home. Rasmea is truly an asset to the Chicago community, a person to be honored and cherished, not punished and ridiculed.

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. Such punitive measures will not serve anyone justice and would cause much more harm than good.

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. The community has shown in overwhelming numbers that we support Rasmea. We are counting on you your Honor, to make the best decision for Rasmea, her family, and for the broader community.

Respectfully yours,



Tracy Benson
Regional Manager
Community Justice Network for Youth
W. Haywood Burns Institute

DEFENDANT'S
EXHIBIT

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