

January 31, 2015

Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, a dedicated community leader. As the retired, longtime Executive Director of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago, and now as President of Just Ventures, LLC, and lecturer and field work coordinator at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration, I greatly appreciate and value the work Ms. Odeh has done and led on behalf of many Chicago area families and communities.

Ms. Odeh's work through AAAN, promoting multi-cultural and multi-ethnic alliances, is critical to solving Chicago's intransigent social and economic challenges. The afterschool and leadership programs she fostered enable youth to have positive channels through which to learn and develop. Initiatives such as the Domestic Violence Program help to reduce the problem of violence and provide avenues to direct services to survivors of domestic violence. Her work with the Arab Women's Committee was vital for hundreds of immigrant and refugee women who came to the US from countries facing war and political crises – like Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, and beyond – who now have a place to seek support, gain empowerment and community, and call their home. In fact, for her "Outstanding Community Leadership", Ms. Odeh received the Chicago Cultural Alliance's Mosaic Award. Indeed, it is with great appreciation that I join in celebrating her achievements, dedication and commitment in particular to our youth, women, and communities.

I am cognizant, too, about the conditions Ms. Odeh endured following her conviction in November. Being in solitary confinement for three weeks was a crushing blow and may have re-triggered her PTSD as a survivor of torture. If she loses her appeal, she will likely lose her citizenship and face deportation which will not only be a great loss and hardship for her but for all of us as well who benefit from her work. If this occurs, her ties to her family and community in Chicago will be severed, a punishment devastating enough without a prison term as well. 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.

Along with so many others from diverse communities who have been so positively impacted by Ms. Odeh, I wish, again, to thank you for your thoughtful consideration and urge leniency in her sentencing.

Sincerely,

Jane Ramsey
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