

I am Area Vice President of the Minnesota AFL-CIO Retirees Council. I am writing to you to request leniency in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh, who I know as a beloved community leader in the Chicago Arab American community. 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. 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.

Compassion in her sentencing will serve justice. She is 67 years old and has already endured imprisonment after her sentencing in a cold, damp and uncomfortable cell in virtual isolation. Because she is a survivor of torture, this time may well have triggered her PTSD.

If she loses her appeal she likely faces deportation and the end of a rich, full and useful life she has built in Chicago over the last 20 years. She will be cut off from family, friends and the important work she has been doing. This is a difficult and heartbreaking prospect at any age but especially hard at her age. This should not be compounded by time in jail.

On the other hand, there is a possibility she will win her appeal. Keeping her out of jail will benefit her and her community. It would allow her to continue to be a productive person serving a community who needs and depends on her.

Respectfully yours,

Wayne Wittman, Mn. AFL-CIO Retiree Council Area Vice President

