



COALITION OF AFRICAN, ARAB, ASIAN,
EUROPEAN & LATINO IMMIGRANTS
OF ILLINOIS

CAAELII

...Sharing a Vision

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Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh who I know as a community leader, colleague and long-time ally of the Arab and larger immigrant community in Chicago. I have known Rasmea for more than 10 years as the founding Executive Director of the Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois. I have known Rasmea in her role as Associate Director of the Arab American Action Network where she has been serving low-income, low-literate Arab immigrants for many years. She also has been an active partner of CAAELII in our cross-cultural, multi-ethnic activities promoting immigrant integration.

In November 2014, Rasmea was convicted of Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization. Compassion in her sentencing will serve justice in this case. She was detained for a month immediately following the verdict, including almost 3 weeks in solitary confinement, which was extremely difficult for her.

As a survivor of torture, engagement for the betterment of her community in Chicago is critical to her emotional health; the isolation she endured while incarcerated was a great hardship and may have retriggered her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

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.

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; adding a prison term should not compound it.

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 and the larger immigrant community as well.

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.

Respectfully yours,

Dale Asis
Former Executive Director

