

Dear Honorable Judge Gershwin Drain,

My name is Mariam Obaid, and I am writing to request leniency from you in the March 12 sentencing of Rasmea Odeh. I know her very well because I am a new immigrant to this country, a member of the Arab Women's Committee that Rasmea established. I would like to say that I am very proud to know Rasmea and to have someone like her in my community.

I never went to school in my life. I don't know how to read or write, even in my native language of Arabic. I used my fingerprint as a signature for years. I never left my house alone. I was dependent first on my father, and then after marriage, my husband. They both always spoke on my behalf. I arrived here with my husband over 25 years ago, spending the first 20 years in California, where all I did was cook and clean, rarely leaving the house. I lived in panic and fear all the time. I never even opened the door when the bell rang.

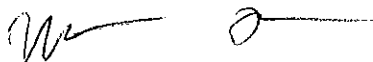
Five years ago, we moved to Illinois, and I met Rasmea three years ago. She encouraged me to participate in the Arab American Action Network (AAAN) English as a Second Language classes and the other activities of the AWC. Rasmea provides us a safe space where we can discuss the difficulties, contradictions, and challenges we face in this country. I learned to read and write in English. I was encouraged to express my feelings and thoughts, and to learn how to reduce the cultural gap between mothers and their American-born children. In addition, we had political discussions that focused on issues like immigrant rights and civil liberties. The program builds active and effective leaders, and I now feel that I am one of them.

Rasmea changed my life and the lives of hundreds of other women in the committee. She pulled me from the darkness to the light, bringing meaning to my life. She has a great sincerity and loyalty to her community and beyond. She is always prepared to help anyone who needs it.

Rasmea is a beloved and respected leader in our community. Her advocacy for us is an example of the work she does for all communities. That is why she is so popular, and why her work in Chicago is considered a model for women's work in the Arab community across the U.S. She is important to all of us, including our families, and that is why we need her to stay with us.

Please take all this into consideration and grant leniency. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Mariam Obaid

February 16, 2015

