



June 28, 2021

The Honorable Deborah K. Chasanow
United States District Court Judge
United States District Court for the District of Maryland
6500 Cherrywood Lane
Greenbelt, MD 20770

Re: United States v. Gwendolyn Levi, Case No. DKC-04-0235

Dear Judge Chasanow:

My name is Kevin Ring and I serve as president of FAMM (formerly Families Against Mandatory Minimums). I am writing in strong support of Gwen Levi's motion for compassionate release. As the head of an organization that works with tens of thousands of families with incarcerated loved ones, I am usually unable to get involved in individual cases. This case is different, however, because I have gotten to know Gwen over the past few months and because of FAMM's work on compassionate release reform and the CARES Act home confinement.

In 2018, FAMM led the effort to convince Congress to include in the First Step Act provisions to reform the federal compassionate release program. For years, we watched in horror and frustration as the Bureau of Prisons denied nearly all requests for compassionate release and frequently failed to even respond to requests. People routinely died waiting for an answer.

We knew that courts were better positioned than prison administrators to consider motions for compassionate release. Thanks to the reform Congress passed, compassionate releases jumped from a couple dozen annually to 145 in 2019 and, when COVID-19 hit, courts were able to save thousands from the deadly virus. We could not have foreseen the arrival of a global pandemic in 2018, but we knew that judges like you should have the discretion to review cases like Gwen's.

As her attorneys have documented, Gwen already has served a very lengthy prison sentence. She used her time in prison constructively: on education, self-improvement and helping others. Most notably, in my view, she took college-level correspondence courses through Anne Arundel Community College and Goucher College of Maryland. My experience, both as an advocate and as someone who was incarcerated in federal prison, taught me that people who take the initiative to apply for and complete college courses while in prison are special. Prison is chaotic and not the best place for learning. The men I saw who used their free time to take college courses stood out. It was clear they had chosen a new, better path for their lives, and I have watched them succeed now on the outside. Gwen strikes me as similarly rehabilitated and eager to make a positive contribution in her community.



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Of course, unlike most motions before the court, you need not guess at whether Gwen's early release would represent a danger to the public. Because of the CARES Act, Gwen was released to home confinement more than a year ago and proved that she was rehabilitated by being productive and law-abiding while at home. I am aware of the recent incident that resulted in her return to prison, and I will not pretend to know more than those involved do about the facts. I will only share that being on electronic monitoring for such a lengthy time is not as easy as it might sound. One reason our organization has been pushing the new administration to address people on CARES Act home confinement is because we know it can be difficult to comply with a multitude of rules, especially when those rules are subject to different interpretations.

Gwen was intent on following the rules. I began talking to her months ago about the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) memo of January 15, 2021, and how that might impact her and approximately 4,000 others on CARES Act home confinement. I asked Gwen if she would be willing to share the story of her release and what it would mean for her to return to prison. She told me she could not talk to the press without permission from the halfway house, so we waited for that. At one point, I asked her to be on the lookout for a call from an interested reporter I sent her way, but she told me her phone's battery had died and she didn't have the right type of charger. She said she was willing to go to the Verizon store, but she would have to wait for permission from the halfway house before she could do that. I ended up sending her one through Amazon, which she received the same afternoon and was so grateful. I share these anecdotes because it was clear to me that Gwen was a rule follower and was intent on complying with the rules of her supervision. She wanted to help us advocate – and she was generous with her time and energy – but she was not willing to cut corners to sacrifice her relative freedom and reunion with her mother and family.

I and others at FAMM were so grateful to meet Gwen and get to know her a bit. I meet lots of returning citizens in my job, but I was bowled over by Gwen. Despite her physical ailments, her energy and positive spirit inspired me. I love that she was looking forward and trying to make a positive impact. She recognized that she broke the law and had to be held accountable, but she never complained to me about her lengthy sentence. She was not going to waste time on the past. She seemed motivated. I just know she could be a value to her community if you granted her compassionate release. She has demonstrated that already.

Lastly, I am aware of at least one other court that has granted compassionate release to an individual who was released on CARES Act home confinement and then recalled for a technical violation of supervision rules. I am inclined to believe that the judge in that case recognized the extra weight her decision carried and that she evaluated not only how this individual satisfied the traditional criteria for compassionate release, but also that the woman's productive, law-abiding time back in the community represented the kind of extraordinary and compelling change in circumstances that favored release. Gwen is no different. You have the discretion to prevent her from spending the rest of her sentence in prison, and I respectfully encourage you to do so.

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Thank you for your service on the federal bench, and for considering my views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin A. Ring". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kevin A. Ring
President