

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
WESTERN DIVISION**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Case No. 7:19-CR-475-LSC-GMB
)	Judge L. Scott Coogler
ALAA MOHD ABUSAAD,)	
)	
Defendant.)	

DEFENDANT’S SENTENCING MEMORANDUM

Defendant, **ALAA MOHD ABUSAAD**, by and through her attorneys, **THOMAS ANTHONY DURKIN, SAMUEL R. HOLMES,** and **STEVEN RANDALL HORTON**, pursuant to Rule 32(c) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, 18 U.S.C. §3553(a), as well as the opinions of the United States Supreme Court in *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005), *Rita v. United States*, 551 U.S. 338 (2007), *Gall v. United States*, 552 U.S. 38 (2007), *Kimbrough v. United States*, 552 U.S. 85 (2007), and *Nelson v. United States*, 555 U.S. 350 (2009), respectfully submits Defendant’s Sentencing Memorandum.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the Court is aware, the Plea Agreement in this case provides that the United States and the Defendant will recommend the maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years. (Dkt. #7, ¶V, p.7) However, this agreement is subject to the government’s filing of a motion for reduction of sentence pursuant to Fed.R. Crim.P. 35(b). (Dkt. #7, p. 1). In that it is counsel’s understanding that the government intends to file such a motion and recommend a sentence of 90 months, this memorandum is necessarily filed, therefore, in support of the government’s motion and recommendation based upon all the factors that the Court must consider under 18 U.S.C. §3553(a). And, as the sentencing recommendation of the parties is not binding on the Court (Dkt. #7, ¶ VII),

counsel respectfully submits that an analysis of the § 3553(a) factors more than justifies the government's recommendation; and, for that matter, an even lower sentence should the Court see fit to exercise its discretion under the § 3553(a) factors as the plea agreement permits.

This is the case since as the Court is well aware, it must fashion a sentence under the § 3553(a) factors that is *sufficient, but not greater than necessary to accomplish the multiple goals of sentencing*. Counsel submit, therefore, that a careful analysis of all of the § 3553(a) factors in this case certainly supports the government's recommendation of 90 months; but could also be said to weigh heavily in the exercise of discretion further downward, especially in light of the consequences of the pandemic on the conditions of Ms. Abusaad's pre-trial confinement of now over 41 months. This is all the more the case here in light of the cooperation she has provided the government and the maturity that she has gained in the course of her pre-trial confinement which is exemplified in her attached letter to the Court marked Exhibit A, dated April 5, 2021, which was written spontaneously by Defendant without any suggestions or edits by counsel.¹ It is a remarkable allocution—one that clearly demonstrates that a different woman stands before the Court than the young girl that was arrested on these charges in 2018.

A. 18 U.S.C §3553(a) Factors

1. Nature and Circumstances of the Offense and The History and Characteristics of the Defendant Under 18 U.S.C §3553(a)(1)

A. Alaa's lonely early life and mental health issues made her vulnerable to the dangers of the internet.

At its core, this is a very sad and complicated case involving a lonely and confused young Muslim girl caught between two conflicting cultures and her misbegotten attempt to find meaning and companionship on the internet. In many ways, she readily fits President Obama's poignant 2014 comment at the United Nations with respect to the coercive propaganda of terrorist

¹ A copy of this letter has been previously supplied to the government.

organizations on the internet.² For most of her young life and for all intents and purposes, Alaa’s social world was non-existent outside of the internet. Up until she married her husband in May of 2018, whom, not coincidentally, she met on the internet, she had virtually zero meaningful friendships in real life outside of her siblings.³ In fact, when undersigned counsel and his law partner first interviewed her at the Shelby County Jail in March of 2019, Alaa expressed dismay that someone she literally described as “her best friend” turned out to be an FBI undercover employee. This, in many ways, says it all with respect to her life of isolation on the internet.

This social isolation and naivety can in large part be seen as the byproduct of Alaa’s upbringing and family dynamic. Born in Chicago and brought to Alabama after her parents’ divorce at age ten, her family of two brothers and six sisters was alienated from other neighbors due to being the only Muslim family in the housing projects in Tuscaloosa, where Alaa often was bullied by her peers. Previously undiagnosed mental health issues that she has experienced since childhood only added to her awkwardness and isolation—as did her strict Muslim upbringing with its attendant sheltering of unmarried women from the outside world.

Thus, her willingness to seek out friendship and meaning online, where she tried desperately to fit in and gain approval of people she had never met outside of social media, can be readily understood from the more detailed explanation of her childhood issues set out in the PSR

² The President’s full quote is as follows: “That [rejecting the ideology of ISIL] means contesting the space that terrorists occupy, including the Internet and social media. Their propaganda has coerced young people to travel abroad to fight their wars and turned students – young people full of potential – into suicide bombers. We must offer an alternative vision.” *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*, Sep. 24, 2014, (available at: <https://bit.ly/3tnfinR>). Whether the government was unable to do so adequately through meaningful countering violent extremism (“CVE”) programs is quite another matter. *See, e.g., Fiza Patel and Meghan Koushik, , Countering Violent Extremism*, Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law(available at https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Brennan%20Center%20CVE%20Report_0.pdf) (last visited April 21, 2022).

³ In following with her inability to forge relationships outside of the internet, Alaa also initially met her husband on social media; this relationship, set forth in the PSR at ¶43, will also be described in further detail below.

at ¶41-50⁴ and below. This is also especially clear from the report of Dr. Steven Xenakis, a retired U.S. Army Brigadier General and a well-known psychiatrist with considerable national experience in terrorism related cases.⁵ His report, dated January 12, 2022 is attached hereto as Exhibit B. It is in this virtual environment that the deeply immature and naïve young woman came into contact with individuals whom she wanted to please, and ultimately led to her interactions with her “best friend,” the FBI’s undercover employee.

Further, the previously undiagnosed, and currently unmedicated, mental health issues set forth in the Xenakis report militate strongly for consideration under § 3553(a).⁶ It is painfully obvious from reading of the PSR and the report of Dr. Xenakis that this offense conduct came from a place of overwhelming and heartbreaking loneliness, and the untreated Major Depressive Disorder in particular, and not from any kind of long-term political commitment to terrorism or political violence. This context is not in any fashion intended to provide an excuse for her actions, which she readily acknowledges in her letter as being quite serious, but rather to provide context and guidance to the history and characteristics of the defendant.

B. Ms. Abusaad has accepted complete responsibility and cooperated fully with the government and has matured while incarcerated.

Clearly, Ms. Abusaad has also shown great remorse for her conduct and accepted full responsibility for her offense, as was noted by Probation. (PSR, ¶22, 32-33), and quite jumps off

⁴ For example, the PSR states that Ms. Abusaad “recalled being bullied by other children, especially during elementary school. She explained that she was insulted and called names by the other children, who sometimes slammed their hands on her desk.” (PSR, ¶46).

⁵ An expert report prepared by Dr. Stephen N. Xenakis is attached hereto as Exhibit B, which will also be discussed in further detail below. The report contains, among other things, Dr. Xenakis’ extremely impressive Curriculum Vitae. Undersigned counsel first met Dr. Xenakis while being counsel in the 9/11 Conspiracy Case in the Military Commissions in Guantanamo Bay Cuba, *United States v. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, et al.* Dr. Xenakis was the forensic psychiatrist in the widely publicized case of the young teen Al Qaeda member, Omar Khadr. See, *United States v. Omar Ahmed Khadr*, 717 F.Supp.2d 1203 (U.S.C.M.C.R. 2007). See CNN, *Youngest Guantanamo detainee pleads guilty*, October 25, 2010 (last visited April 20, 2022) (available at <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/10/25/khadr.plea/>)

⁶ Dr. Xenakis concludes that defendant suffers from Major Depressive Disorder (DSMV-V 296.23) and Attention Deficit Disorder (DSMV-314.00) (Ex. B, p 6)

the page of her letter in allocution. As mentioned, it is quite accurate to say that the same woman who stands before the Court for sentencing, is not the same naïve, immature and socially isolated young girl attached to the internet in 2018. She has come a long way from the confused, awkward, and naïve young girl that undersigned counsel met several years ago when they first appeared this case. While incarcerated, she has had to learn to be more discerning of her surroundings and other people, and has been forced to mature into more of a real adult than the child-like, naïve person her family has described her as prior to her incarceration.

It should also not go unnoted that Alaa has already been incarcerated pre-trial at the Shelby County Jail in Columbiana for almost four years throughout the duration of these proceedings, including during the incredibly harsh conditions brought on by the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, and again with the highly transmissible Omicron variant that recently raged throughout the country. In fact, at the time of this writing she has already served almost 42 months in federal custody under unusually harsh conditions.

Through it all, Ms. Abusaad continues to have an incredibly supportive local family in Tuscaloosa, as well as a very supportive father in Chicago, and her husband overseas; all of whom are more than willing to help her hold herself to her new outlook on life. And, Alaa commits never to fall back into her old habits of withdrawing to the cyber world that led her to this place. She also hopes very much to return to her academic studies, which she deeply regrets having derailed through her conduct.

C. The One-Size-Fits-All Guidelines

Additionally, this case and this Court's decision on discretion of a sentence sufficient but not greater than necessary, cannot be fully addressed without analyzing the rather unique pitfalls of the draconian sentencing guidelines' terrorism enhancement. Rather than providing nuance and guidance to sentencing in terrorism related sentencing, the Sentencing Commission has opted for

a one-size-fits-all warehousing approach. As the Court is aware, and the PSR acknowledges (PSR, ¶26), any defendant convicted of a terrorism related offense automatically obtains a 12-point increase in the Base Offense Level. To make matters worse, the defendant also gets automatically placed in Criminal History Category VI, even if, as here, the case is the Defendant's first arrest. (PSR, ¶37). This, in many ways, greatly skews anything close to a nuanced consideration of individualized sentencing. For example, the starting point for the guidelines range of 151 to 188 months, is brought down to 120 months due to the conviction's statutory ten-year maximum. This is a far cry from what would otherwise be the 70–87-month range for a Base Offense Level 20 without the 12-point increase for the terrorism enhancement. (PSR, ¶24). Without the terrorism enhancement, therefore, and with the agreed three-point decrease for acceptance of responsibility, Ms. Abusaad would be facing a guidelines range of only 51-63 months—very close, if not a sentence of time served.

Thus, counsel would urge that while the Court considers the terrorism enhancement as its starting point, as it must, it also should read the thoughtful concurring opinion of Judge Guido Calabresi of the Second Circuit in the controversial case of *United States v. Lynn Stewart*, 590 F.3d 93, 154 (2d Cir. 2009), in which he considers the potential draconian application of the terrorism enhancement and observes as follows: “When a Guidelines recommendation has such dramatic consequences and yet covers a multitude of sins, unusually broad sentencing discretion in the district court is essential. Indeed, it must be so to comply with the Supreme Court’s remedial holding in *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220, 244 (2005).”⁷

⁷ For example, as Judge Calabresi points out the same enhancement applies whether “the terrorist whom the defendant funds attempts to detonate an explosive in a public place, but the explosives do not go off properly and so cause only a few injuries and on death that results, in part also from inadequate medical treatment... and in [a] second case [where] the terrorist’s detonation attempt succeeds, blowing up a city bus and causing a major traffic collision that kills or injures hundreds of people.” See *United States v. Stewart*, 590 F.3d 93, 157 (2d Cir. 2009). Again, from these examples, the enhancement would also apply equally to someone sending \$100.00 to Hamas. The list of discrepancies in this application are virtually endless.

Further, while admittedly an outlier case, Judge Milan D. Smith, Jr. of the 9th Circuit articulated in the recent case that the terrorism enhancement does not automatically apply to all material support offenses. *United States v. Amer Sinana Alhaggagi*, 978 F.3d 693, 699 (9d Cir. 2020). It is possible for a defendant to provide material support to a terrorist group without intending that the support or resources would influence, affect, or retaliate against government conduct. *Id.* The standard to analyze the applicability of the terrorism enhancement is also outlined in *United States v. Awan*, 607 F.3d 306, 313 (2d Cir. 2010). There, the Second Circuit explained that the disjunctive phrase from U.S.S.G. § 3A1.4, —if the offense involved, OR was intended to promote, a federal crime of terrorism—makes clear that the predicate offense must either: (1) involve a federal crime of terrorism; or, (2) be intended to promote a federal crime of terrorism, and that each clause has a separate meaning. *Id.* at 313.

While Ms. Abusaad has conceded by the Plea Agreement that the Terrorism Enhancement applies (Plea Agreement, pp. 5-6), it should not go unnoticed, as already mentioned, that but for the Terrorism Enhancement, Ms. Abusaad's guidelines range would be a mere 51-63 months. That is, a sentence well below the range of time-served with credit for good time.⁸ While counsel are not walking back the agreement that the terrorism enhancement is applicable as it has been found to be in virtually all other material support cases,⁹ this is a factor that could well be considered under § 3553(a)(1).

While this by definition is a terrorism related offense that will continued to have draconian affects upon defendant's future there are cases such as this that might not meet a layman's

⁸ As of April 20, 2022, Alaa has been detained pre-trial for 41 months and 28 days.

⁹ *US v. Jayyousi*, 657 F.3d 1085, 1115 (11d. Cir. 2011) (Terrorism Enhancement applied to defendant conspiring to provide material support to terrorism organization to advance violent jihad); *U.S. v. Suarez*, 893 F.3d 1330, 1336-37, (11d. Cir. 2018)(Terrorism Enhancement applied to defendant who provided material support to terrorist organization and was attempting to construct an explosive device); *United States v. Van Haften*, 881 F.3d 543, 544 (7d. Cir. 2018). (Terrorism Enhancement applied to defendant attempting to join ISIS and seek revenge against United States government).

perception of terrorism and the violence usually associated with it. And counsel would submit that this offense conduct, while certainly serious, was hardly an immediate threat to the country's national security. Again, saying this is not, however, an attempt to excuse the conduct or minimize it; but only to provide context and mitigation. Sadly, had Alaa or her family had the resources and awareness to confront some of her growing mental health issues earlier, it is quite unlikely she would find herself before this Court today.

In order to appreciate this more fully it is helpful to get a sense of her rather unusual and complicated background from the many impressive and heartfelt letters in support, attached as Exhibit C.¹⁰ Alaa was born in Chicago, a middle child among her seven siblings. When Alaa was ten years old, her parents divorced. Her father stayed in Chicago, while her mother moved Alaa and her seven siblings to Tuscaloosa where they then needed to rely on government assistance and became the only Muslim family in the public housing projects. As her mother Fayeza recalls, "As a single mother of eight children, there have been times where things have not been easy for me." (*See F. Abuzer Letter*). As a child, Alaa was alienated from her community both due to the cultural differences as well as then-undiagnosed mental health issues and was bullied by her peers.

As described in the PSR, Abusaad "recalled being bullied by other children, especially during elementary school. She explained that she was insulted and called named by other children, who sometimes slammed their hands on her desk." (PSR, ¶46). Her brother Ebrahim writes, "Growing up Alaa was easily the smallest one of us physically, I guess that's why it was easy for people to pick on her when we were children." (*See E. Abusaad Letter*). Alaa has also written numerous detailed letters to counsel and Dr. Xenakis regarding these experiences, of which a few

¹⁰ There are thirteen (13) character letters attached as group Exhibit C. They are from the following individuals: William E. Richardson (Physics Instructor, Shelton State Community College); Nada Dibas (Prisoner and Family Support Coordinator, Coalition for Civil Freedoms); Karen K.R. Bradley (family friend); Belgacem Ghmougui (husband); Fayeza Abuzer (mother); Mohd Abusaad (father), and her five sisters (Kawther, Ayah, Noor, Huda, and Tasneem) and two brothers (Ebrahim and Yahya).

examples are provided here: In elementary school, others mocked her for being too poor to have the latest video games or even her own backpack. After she started wearing a hijab daily to school in seventh grade, the bullying escalated even further, including a physical attack from a fellow student who hit her in the neck. On another occasion, a student yelled “Terrorist” at her as she walked by a classroom; she dealt with ignorant and racist questions like being asked if Osama bin Laden was her uncle. In yet another hurtful memory, Alaa recalls being told by an adult teacher that she would go to Guantanamo Bay for taking a poster that had fallen off the wall. These are just a few of the ruthless, harmful moments that she experienced that had long-lasting effects on her social life and self-image. Feeling she did not quite fully fit in anywhere, whether it was at school or at home or at the mosque, she then retreated into the cyber world of the internet as a refuge and for social interaction.

Alaa has also suffered from intense anxiety and mood swings since she was a child, which contributed to inability to socialize except for on the internet. Dr. Xenakis' report describes Alaa's mental health factors and his diagnoses of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD); he also explains how in his professional opinion they would be best treated in a non-carceral setting. His conclusion set forth in the conclusion of his carefully done report is worth replicating in full:

Ms. Abusaad requires treatment for persistent depression, anxiety, and attention deficit. An effective course of treatment includes therapy, counseling, and psychotropic medications. She requires comprehensive evaluation for somatic aches and pains including joint swelling. She demonstrates willingness to comply with required supervision and oversight if and when released from jail. There is no evidence that continued incarceration benefits her health or further protects the country from dangerous enemy actors.

(Ex. B, Xenakis Report, p. 4).

In their numerous character letters from both parents and each of her seven siblings, Alaa is described as a naïve, sweet, sensitive young woman who made serious efforts to help others

despite her own social difficulties. Her mother Fayeza calls her a “light and an incredible person with a beautiful soul.” (F. Abuzer Letter), and her father Mohd remembers that “she was the one who made sure to contact her parents daily to check on us, see how our day was going, and make sure we didn’t need anything.” (M. Abusaad Letter). Her sister Kawther recalls getting cheered up by Alaa’s “dad jokes” and that she “has so much more to contribute to the community and to society with her kindness, generosity, and intelligence.” (K. Abusaad Letter). Also, her sister Noor recalls how Alaa helped her be patient and forgiving of a person who hit Noor’s car in an accident. (N. Abusaad Letter). Poignantly, her older brother Ebrahim provides an anecdote from when an older sister left for college that provides insight on her economic situation as well as her caring but child-like nature: “Alaa couldn’t afford to buy her a parting gift so she wrote her letters to look back at and smile if she ever missed us and drew her pictures of us and put them all in an envelope and gave them to her when she left.” (E. Abusaad Letter). Additionally, her siblings are deeply grateful that Alaa, who excelled in academics as described further below, has encouraged them in their studies over the years. For example, her sister Ayah writes about how Alaa advised her on her college admissions standardized tests, and her younger brother Yahya remembers her helping him choose his classes. (A. Abusaad Letter; Y. Abusaad Letter). Her family’s letters also detail the stress and financial strain this case has already presented to their lives.

Ms. Abusaad’s husband, Belgacem Ghmougui, has also remained supportive of her, despite her incarceration and his own voluntary removal to his native Tunisia, after being arrested in Ohio by ICE at the time of Defendant’s arrest in October of 2018. In a character letter written on Alaa’s behalf, Belgacem also describes her good nature; but also notes her naïve social qualities that in real life come off as child-like but that on the internet made her vulnerable to dangerous individuals. For example, Belgacem writes, “She have a very playful and childish soul. She would run to the candy isle [*sic*] in Walmart and yell candy! candy! She would jump on the couch and

yell Jump! Jump!” (See, B. Ghmougui Letter). Once they were married and living together, Belgacem attempted to help her adapt to adult responsibilities, such as teaching her how to drive a car. He wanted her to have “a real life with a religious man, not an online life with fake religious and extreme people.” *Id.* Belgacem describes Alaa as easily tricked, and not someone who understands politics, but is driven by wanting to connect with and help others, even though she barely knows how. Unfortunately, by the time Ms. Abusaad moved to Ohio and had finally found the companionship she had been looking for in her husband, it was too late, as she had already committed her offense conduct and was soon to be arrested.

Before her incarceration, Ms. Abusaad excelled in her academic studies despite her unprivileged difficult background. She received her Associate’s Degree from Shelton State Community College in 2016, and she was in the process of obtaining her Bachelor’s degree in geology at the University of Alabama before she married her husband and moved to Ohio with him. In Ohio, she transferred to the University of Toledo where she was trying to finish her degree at the time she and her husband were arrested.¹¹

As demonstrated by the letter from her former physics instructor at Shelton State Community College, William Richardson, Ms. Abusaad was an incredible student whose intelligence and work ethic made a significant impression on those around her. “It was not only because of her outstanding academic work that I remember her; Alaa had a profound effect on her classmates as well. Other students would often come to her for help when they ran into a difficult problem or needed an explanation for a laboratory procedure.” (See W. Richardson Letter). Ms.

¹¹ Her husband was subsequently voluntarily deported in 2019 to his home country of Tunisia. Sadly, the circumstances surrounding her internet marriage itself, its upheaval of her education, and move to another part of the country where she had no other family or social contacts demonstrates as clearly as anything else the same social isolation and desperateness that caused her to seek solace on the internet in the first instance. This is not in any fashion a critique of her husband who has remained very supportive and concerned about Alaa and this case. Nor is it meant to disparage the Islamic custom of arranged marriages. It does, however, speak to the conflicting cultural issues Alaa faced in her early years of transition from a teenager to adulthood.

Abusaad deeply regrets jeopardizing her education as a result of her conduct. Ms. Abusaad hopes to be able to return some day to pursuing her studies and achieving her great academic potential, should the Court grant her another meaningful opportunity to do so.

All in all, Ms. Abusaad is a meek, awkward, and tragic young woman who admittedly made a most serious mistake; but she is by no means a hardened, zealous criminal, much less a hardened and zealous terrorist. A strong case can readily be made that she was instead driven by her total loneliness and confused, immature perception of social interactions, and not any serious dedication to political violence.

2. A Sentence Sufficient to Comply with 18 U.S.C. §3553 (a)(2)-(7)

After the sentencing judge considers the nature and circumstances of the offense and the history and characteristics of the defendant, as this Court is no doubt aware, it is charged with fashioning a sentence that is sufficient, but not greater than necessary—taking into account the need for the sentence to reflect the seriousness of the offense, promote respect for the law, provide just punishment for the offense, afford adequate deterrence, protect the public from further crimes of the defendant, and provide defendant with needed educational or vocational training, medical care, or other correctional treatment in the most effective manner. 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)(2)(A)-(D). The sentence should also reflect the kinds of sentences available, pertinent policy statements, the need to avoid unwarranted sentence disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar conduct. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)(2)-(7). Accordingly, comments on a few of these provisions are pertinent, and will be addressed below.

However, Counsel respectfully submits that the Court should also not ignore the unique realities of the COVID-19 pandemic upon incarcerated individuals.

a. The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

The harsh reality of serving time within the BOP during the pandemic has caused federal judges to address the situations themselves. One District Court, Judge Paul Oetken of the District Court of the District of Columbia explained the harsh reality that inmates face these days:

[M]ost of the time has been in lockdown conditions 23 hours a day, basically like solitary confinement with no access to visitors for most of that time, virtually limited programming. And I do believe that because it's been harsher than a usual period that it's more punitive, that it's essentially the equivalent of either time and a half or two times what would ordinarily be served. So, I think having served 24 months is equivalent to having served three years. That's what I believe in terms of how punitive it's been and how harsh it's been.

See United States of America v. Garcia, No. 18-146 (JDB), 2021 WL 4848700 (D.D.C.) (October 8, 2021) citing Sentencing Tr. at 17-18, *United States v. Gonzalez*, Case No. 1:18-cr-00669-JPO, ECF No. 250 (S.D.N.Y. April 2, 2021). Another District Court Judge, the well-respected Jed S. Rakoff of the Southern District of New York, reduced a sentence because he opined that the pandemic not only threatened the individual defendant's health, but also made the defendant's "incarceration harsher and more punitive than would otherwise have been the case." *United States v. Rodriguez*, 492 F.Supp.3d. 306, 311 (S.D.N.Y 2020). While Ms. Abusaad has been in federal pretrial custody at the Shelby County Jail, the harsh reality Judge Oetken and Judge Rakoff outline is most certainly, if not more, applicable to inmates incarcerated in other facilities as mitigation efforts for COVID-19 pandemic taken outside prison walls are largely impossible within those walls.

2. Other 3553(a) Factors

a. The Need to Reflect the Seriousness of the Offense

Pursuant to §3553(a)(2)(A), the Court shall also consider the need for the sentence imposed to reflect the seriousness of the offense, to promote respect for the law, and to provide just punishment. It simply cannot be said that a person in Ms. Abusaad's circumstances having been arrested and detained in Ohio, taken to Alabama in chains, and having spent almost 42 months

in federal custody, and most of which in the Shelby County Jail during the height of a pandemic, cannot be said to be serious enough to satisfy the requirements of this section. No one could simply say that the time already served, especially in light of the conditions of confinement brought on by the pandemic is a mere slap on the wrist. This has truly been the proverbial “hard time.”

b. General Deterrence

Pursuant to §3553(a)(2)(B), the Court shall also consider the need for the sentence to afford adequate general deterrence to criminal conduct. As previously mentioned, this is and has been a hard sentence already, and most certainly should send a loud and clear message to those situated like her who might also be tempted to form meaning and comfort through internet and political activity such as this.

c. The Need to Protect the Public

In determining a sentence, the Court shall also consider the need for the sentence imposed to protect the public from further crimes of the Defendant, pursuant to § 3553(a)(2)(C). As has already been argued and is evident from defendant’s letter of allocution this is a truly changed woman who now stands before the court any possible concerns regarding this issue can readily be resolved with the strict conditions of Supervised Release proposed by Probation and readily available to the Court. With the suggested mental health counseling, family support, and guidance of Probation, this Court can rest well assured that Defendant will not be a risk of recidivism.

d. The Need to Provide the Defendant with needed educational or vocational training, medical care, or other correctional treatment in the most effective manner

In determining a sentence, the Court shall also consider the need for the sentence imposed to provide the Defendant with needed educational or vocational training, medical care, or other correctional treatment in the most effective manner, pursuant to § 3553(a)(2)(D). As the

Xenakis report makes clear, Alaa is in need of treatment for her depression which could be far better served on an out-patient basis. And, continuing her college educations as she desperately wishes to resume, is also critical.

e. **The Need to Avoid Unwanted Sentencing Disparities**

Pursuant to §3553(a)(6), the Court shall also consider the need for the sentence imposed to reflect the need to avoid unwarranted sentencing disparities among defendants with similar CLU.S.C. § 2339C as opposed to §2339A and B, counsel does not believe there are many statistics to guide the Court. However, one case in particular does stand out as it is a case in which he was lead defense counsel in the Northern District of Indiana. There, the Defendant received a sentence of only 78 months and three years' Supervised Release in circumstances arguably far more culpable than this case. *See United States v. Elhassani*, 2:19-CR-00159-PPS-JEM, (Northern Dist. of Indiana, Nov. 9, 2020). A copy of Judge Phillip Simon's sentencing opinion is attached hereto for the Court's convenience.

II. **CONCLUSION**

While the Plea Agreement limits further aggressive advocacy, counsel submit that considerable discretion is in order for all the reasons stated herein.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Thomas Anthony Durkin
THOMAS ANTHONY DURKIN

/s/Samuel R Holmes
SAMUEL R HOLMES

/s/ Steven Randall Horton
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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Thomas Anthony Durkin, Attorney at Law, hereby certifies that the foregoing was served on April 25, 2022 in accordance with Fed.R.Crim.P.49, Fed.R.Civ.P.5, LR 5.5, and the General Order on Electronic Case Filing (ECF) pursuant to the district court's system as to ECF filers.

/s/ Thomas Anthony Durkin
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EXHIBIT A

April 5, 2021

Dear Honorable Judge Coogler,

Before you sentence me I have a few things that I would like to say. There are many people who deserve an apology from me. I want to explain why I did what I did. I want to tell you what I have learned since being in jail and how I have changed. You may not know much about me, but I hope this will give you an insight to who I am and if I deserve another chance.

I want to apologize first for acting so immaturity. I am embarrassed by the conduct that brought me to where I am now. I embarrassed not only myself but also my family who I burdened so greatly financially and mentally. I'm sorry they had to make so many sacrifices for me. I'm sorry to my professors who believed in me and expected good things from me. I am especially sorry to Professor M. Minzoni who spoke so highly of me. I'm sorry I let him down. I'm sorry to my community for taking their sense of security. I am sorry to the government which I disrespected.

Although at the time I did not see it, what I did was very serious. I know now how foolish I was to commit a crime against the government. I spoke so arrogantly. I sent money thinking it was the right thing to do. At the time I was not conscious of American presence in Syria, regardless, I acted upon ignorance without reflecting on how my actions may endanger an innocent life. I wanted to help Syrian civilians from the tyrant Assad but the way that I wanted to help them was wrong. I did it without respect to the government, my community, or my family. If I did not think so childishly that I knew better than my parents, siblings, my husband, and everyone who would have stopped me before I even took a single step toward sending money and spoke up to them, I could have saved myself.

I thought I knew better than everyone. I was ignorant to reality. I was immature in the way I made myself seem like I knew more than I did, in the way that I endangered my family who were not even involved, and in the fantasy double life I was living online. At the time that I was sending the money I was depressed. I felt like the world was closing in on me. I felt lonely even at home. I could not make any friends at the University no matter how hard I tried. I felt like a failure (even though the worst grade I made was a C). My self image was not good. I felt trapped in the life I was living. The way I always escape from my problems was by going online and living a different life. I wanted to get married and move out of my mother's house. I wanted to quit school because it was getting to difficult. I wanted changed and the way I was seeking it was through social media.

I said some very immature and ignorant things. I especially said some things I regret about the government. I was ignorant about the military. In my mind when I spoke to the UCE, I only saw a painted picture of evil when it came to the American troops. I saw Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. I saw the rape, torture, and humiliation of Muslims. I projected what I saw from a few onto all soldiers. I did a similar generalization with the FBI.

I believe I have changed since the time that I spoke to the UCE. I got married and got offline even before being arrested. After coming to jail I learned so much. I met a variety of people. I met people of different races, religions, and backgrounds. I met veterans and their families and saw kindness and respect that I did not expect. It really opened my eyes to how unfair my opinion was about them. After cooperating with the government I also got to see a more human side to the FBI as well. I also learned that I cannot continue to be so gullible and naïve. I learned not to let people step on me and what I can say "no." I'm not so easily swayed now that I will do something that I feel is wrong. This was the biggest hurdle for me to overcome. I had to get over the fear of being disliked and know when it is right to turn people down. I see how foolish I was to exaggerate

how much I knew and how much I can do. I learned that I will always be ignorant about something until I take the steps to become informed. I learned much from being in jail, but the most important thing that I learned is to always ask for advice even when I think I know.

When I am released I plan to graduate with my Bachelor's degree. Then plan to go to graduate school. I was a senior before being arrested. I would like to graduate and get a job to help support my family. I would also like to set a good example for my younger siblings. I would like to make up for what I have done. I plan to possibly volunteer for organisations such as the Coalition for Civil Freedoms.

I hope you consider what I have said in this allocution before you sentence me. Thank you for the time you have taken to read it.

Sincerely,

Alaa Abusaad

EXHIBIT B

Under Seal

EXHIBIT C

January 6, 2022

Judge L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Dear Judge Coogler,

This is a letter of reference for Ms. Alaa Abusaad. She was a student in both semesters of my general physics course at Shelton State Community College a few years back.

Alaa was an outstanding student in these classes which are taken primarily by students who are studying to become engineers. Alaa made a grade of A in both semesters. It was not only because of her outstanding academic work that I remember her; Alaa had a profound effect on her classmates as well. Other students would often come to her for help when they ran into a difficult problem or needed an explanation for a laboratory procedure.

There are many instances where she made a noteworthy impact on the people around her but there is one that stand out involving a personal interaction. Alaa did not take the Physics 213 and 214 classes in sequential semesters. She took 213 in the Spring of 2015 and the Physics 214 course in the fall semester of 2016. In the fall of 2016, my health had started deteriorating leading to a diagnosis of cancer a year or so later. I informed the students who sat in the first 2 rows near the teachers table to feel free to move back further in the classroom. All took me up on the offer except Alaa. Not only did she remain in the first row, but she also stated that she was interested in the information and learned better when closer to the teacher. She later came to my office to discuss a problem but found time to express her personal concerns for my wellbeing.

Comparing Alaa to all the other students in the same level class she is a person of great promise and potential. I am truly sorry about what happened to her and wish that it had not happened. It has happened so now I am left to beg for leniency in your sentencing. If ever there was one deserving of a second chance in life it is Alaa Abusaad, a person of tremendous talent and a great passion for learning.

Respectfully,

X

William E. Richardson
Instructor
Physics/Engineering
Shelton State Community College
e-mail: wrichardson@sheltonstate.edu
mobile phone: 205-8782-8770



P.O. Box 55713 Washington, D.C. 20040
202.627.0887 | info@civilfreedoms.org | civilfreedoms.org | [@civilfreedoms](https://twitter.com/civilfreedoms)

December 31, 2021

Honorable Judge L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd. Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: Alaa Abusaad #66071-060

Dear Judge Coogler,

I am writing to you on behalf of Ms. Alaa Abusaad and her family. I am an officer of the Coalition for Civil Freedoms (CCF), and in that capacity I have had the pleasure of regularly corresponding with Alaa and her family since December 2020. CCF is an organization that advocates for the civil liberties and human rights of prisoners we believe pose no risk to society, a category Alaa falls under. I urge you to exercise leniency in your sentencing of Alaa and I ask that you consider my testament of her good character in her favor.

From working with Alaa, I have come to learn about her great qualities and exemplary character. She has a thirst for knowledge and a personal commitment to growth— and she is proactive about seeking both. Alaa regularly requests that I provide her with resources like books, courses, news sources, guidance counselors/mentors, creative activities, and more. She welcomes unfamiliar topics and tells me that she wishes to learn about everything. Moreover, Alaa cares deeply for the wellbeing of those around her and frequently shares the little she has. Any resources I send to her, she readily shares with others. On multiple occasions, she wrote to me explaining the difficult situations of others and requested my assistance in helping them.

Furthermore, I have witnessed the emotional and financial difficulty Alaa's incarceration has had on her family. I have also witnessed the immense love and care they have for her. Based on this, I strongly believe that Alaa will have their continued love and support through her incarceration and release. Alaa's character is exemplary, and she is deserving of your leniency. Leniency in your decision would serve the best outcome for everyone involved and conversely, I believe any punishment beyond the minimum will cause unnecessary harm to Alaa, her family, and her community which stands to benefit from Alaa's incredible and rare qualities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nada Dibas".

Nada Dibas
Prisoner and Family Support Coordinator,
Coalition for Civil Freedoms



Karen K. R. Bradley
164 Graylawn Ave. Apt. C
Petaluma, CA 94952

January 1, 2022

Judge L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

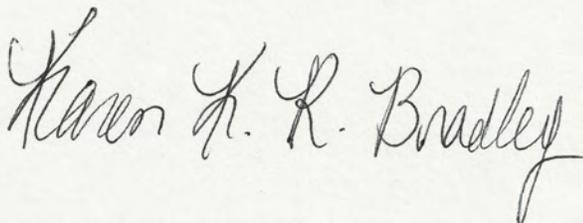
Dear Judge Coogler:

I am writing to you on behalf of Alaa Abusaad. I have known Alaa and her family as friends for over fourteen years. Since our first meeting many years ago, I have held Alaa in high regard and am therefore happy to help her by writing this letter of reference.

Throughout our friendship, Alaa has shown great care and dependability in her work and personal life. She has been trusted by family, friends and neighbors with childcare, as she is reliable and attentive. In both her volunteer work and spare time, she has tutored children in various subjects to help them improve their scholastic and artistic abilities.

I thank you for your time and consideration. Any leniency with Alaa's sentencing will significantly ease the financial and emotional burden of this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen K. R. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K' and a long, sweeping underline.

Karen K. R. Bradley

Belgacem Ghmougui
Ben Arous, Tunisia 1145

December 30, 2021

Judge L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Dear Judge Coogler,

My name is Belgacem Ghmougui. I'm Alaa's Husband. I lived in the US since 2010. I graduated with an Electrical Engineering with 3.9 GPA in 2017. I was working with my degree for Heinz in Toledo, OH when I met Alaa online in 2018. I was searching for a religious wife who believes in traditional marriage from a good family. She was the one I was looking for and more; God fearing, shy, loves to help and do good to people, with very rare innocent character... My family met hers and we got married in May 2018 (5 months before her arrest).

I can't believe until this day that that big of a case is for my little girl Alaa. I can't believe she's in jail now. I hate to share our private life but It's ok for the sake of her case. She have a very playful and childish soul. She would run to the candy aisle in Walmart and yell candy! candy! She would jump on the couch and yell Jump! Jump! She loved cartoons, funny things, and hated serious and sad ending movies. She's very sensitive. One word would make her cry and another could make her happy. She hated oppression and would never let me finish a movie where there's oppression. She was once depressed for whole day because she saw one of the birds we were feeding in a zoo dead!

Alaa is a charity person. More than a normal way. To give you an example. When we both first were in Jail (I was for immigration), she sent me a letter saying if I get out to please help an inmate who was with her because she had nobody! I was about to be deported, she had a huge case, and our lives went sideways and she was asking me that. She would say things like "I can't let her down" and "I can't abandon her" as if they were her responsibility. All her bank account is full of charity although she wasn't working and her family are nearly poor. She had charity group online who were gathering money to support a single mother with her dept.

Alaa is gullible. She's easily tricked and easily pushed. I believe that her charitable character is what led her into this case. She was never extreme. In fact she hated extreme people. FBI have our electronics and messages and they told me that we aren't extreme people. They saw a conversation between us which shows that we both hated extremism. Alaa doesn't understand politics. Nor she does believe what Al Qaeda or ISIS believes. She simply felt for innocent children and women in Syria.

FBI told me that Alaa's activity wasn't when we were married. Although I gave her \$4000 as tradition in our wedding. I bought her a car; she could go wherever she want. Yet she didn't do anything. She wanted to finish school. She told me she would really want to have a baby. I was applying for green card. She started to get used to the city, the community, our friends...She started to have a real life with a religious man. Not an online life with fake religious and extreme people.

Alaa lost her reputation, her future, her husband, her freedom, and her dignity. She was stripped of her modest clothes. She was bullied in jail. Jail affected her health. I believe she learned her lesson first day in

jail. She cooperated with the government. Alaa is a good wife, friend, classmate, a citizen, and a neighbor. I assure you that that mistake will never be repeated again.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Belgacem Ghmougui.

From: Fayeza Abuzer
621 61st St
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

December 22, 2021

To: The Honorable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: Character Reference Letter to Court

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

My name is Fayeza Abuzer, I am writing this letter to provide a character reference about Alaa Abusaad. I know Alaa as my loving daughter. I have known her since she was born when I first met her and held her in my arms; and I have watched her grow over the years into the kind, thoughtful, and loving young lady she is today. Alaa has always been smiling and happy, even as a little toddler when she got her first haircut and we showed her herself in the mirror she started smiling and laughing as she observed her new look. I remember her trying to make me laugh as she danced on her little feet and stood on her toes while she had the biggest and most beautiful smile on her little face. To watching her grow into a teenager who would always make jokes and silly impressions to cheer her siblings up if any of them ever seemed down by making them smile which seemed to come easily to her.

As a single mother of eight children, there have been times where things have not been easy for me. Part of that was keeping track of each child's school work and progress. However, Alaa has never been a child that was difficult. She always did well in school, her teachers always praised her. Alaa never got into any trouble in school or anywhere else. She would focus her time on her studies and books as well as giving back to the community whenever she could. While she was in high school, Alaa would tutor children in math for free, she would also volunteer around fifty hours a year for Beta Club. I also remember her helping with the riverwalk clean up and volunteering at the native American Society festival in the children's section. She went from a little five year old who needed me to hold her hand in order to outline her letters for her kindergarten homework, then an intelligent teenager who won a summer science competition with her group at a UA science program, to a young college student who earned herself a full ride scholarship to the University of Toledo.

Alaa's dream was to finish her schooling and work with children in childcare, she was leaning towards daycare. She had recently gotten married and dreamed of having children of her own. However, I wanted her to do something more practical and convinced her to change her major. She was currently studying to become a geologist. Alaa has always been a light and an incredible person with a beautiful soul. She is a loving person who is always forgiving and only wants to do good.

This case has come as a shock to us as a family and it has been especially difficult for us to see Alaa in this situation. It has also been very difficult for us financially, we have all had to use all of our lifetime savings. We just wanted to try to help Alaa because she means the world to us and we want to see her as the cheerful person she once was. I always remember her, pray for her, and wish for her to be with us and finally be able to meet my two grandchildren for the first time. I wish for her to be able to live her life and reunite with her husband and her family where she belongs. It makes me feel awful as a mother to hear when she is threatened in jail with no help and when she talks about her health issues she has gotten over the past three years. We respect the court, and also hope that you would be able to see Alaa from our eyes as the kind hearted person she is and grant her the leniency we believe she truly deserves.

To: The Honorable Judge L. Scott Coogler

US District Court

North District of Alabama

Dear Judge Coogler,

My name is Mohd Abu Saad an American Citizen and father of Alaa. I am writing you asking for your honor's leniency in Alaa sentencing. Alaa has always been a well mannered girl who was careful to listen to her parents. She cared very deeply for the wellbeing of her parents, family, and other people. She was the one who made sure to contact her parents daily to check on us, see how our day was going, and make sure we didn't need anything. She did the same for her brothers and sisters helping motivate them to excel at school, work, and extend a helping hand to when they need it.

Alaa practices what she preaches as she was hard at work in her studies and was careful to spend her time in a productive manner. She is always first to reach out to us and her siblings to comfort listen and share the joys and challenges of our daily lives. She puts the well being of her family ahead of her own and provides kind, constructive, and positive feedback and actions to people in her life. She is balanced and very peaceful with not even a speeding ticket on her record prior to this situation.

Two days ago I saw Alaa in my dream! We had a big long hug and she told me that she wanted to come home with me. My eyes were tearing as I felt hopeless to help my most beloved, loving, caring, positive, and full of life daughter. My daughter who filled our hearts and lives with Joy and happiness. All I have your honor is plea of leniency from you to bring our daughter back to us. Help us reunite a loving family and resurrect the future of a bright, young, caring, and loving daughter. Thank you your honor for your time and consideration.

With Respect,

Mohd Abu Saad.

Kawther Abusaad

621 61st Street
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

26th December 2021

Honorable Judge L. Scott Coogler

United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa AL 35401

Dear Judge Coogler,

My name is Kawther Abusaad. I am the sister of Alaa Abusaad. I am writing to you regarding Alaa, to describe her character. I have known her all of her life, she has always been a kind and generous person. She is always eager to help others and to do charitable work. She would do a lot of volunteer work in high school as well as in college. She is a selfless, compassionate person who gives what she can from what she has to help others in need; or to the less fortunate. Alaa has always opened her heart to everyone she met, as she is such a kind person.

Alaa has a bubbly personality and would come to anyone's aid when anyone is feeling down. She would cheer them up with light-hearted "dad-jokes" or just being her bright self. When she was younger, she used to make little notes for people whenever they were facing difficulties reminding them to relax, and that with all hardship comes ease. Alaa always has good intentions and at her core, she is a soft and good hearted person.

She was aspiring to become a geologist and was excited to contribute to her field of study. She has so much more to contribute to the community and to society with her kindness, generosity, and intelligence . I love her very much, her whole family does; we are worried about her and we miss her deeply. She is a good kid, a good student, and an even better sister. We hope that she is afforded another opportunity to live up to her full potential. Please, I am asking you to take all of this information into consideration and be lenient in her sentencing.

Sincerely, Kawther Abusaad

From: Ayah Abusaad
621 61st St
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

December 25, 2021

To: The Honourable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: Character Reference Letter to Court

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

I am Ayah Abusaad, Alaa's sister. We had been together all our lives up until she was married, and she was always so full of energy. She would frequently make playful jokes that would often brighten my mood. Ever since she was arrested, my family and I have been incredibly stressed and worried for her well being. She is very sweet and very dear to us, and we were devastated by the news. Alaa has been there throughout my life to give me advice about school and maturity. She advised me to take the ACT early so that I had a better chance at getting a scholarship with an earlier application and more options for schools open. She has taught me how to have more patience for others. An example of this is how she advised me to remain level-headed whenever someone says something hurtful to me. She advised me to ignore them and to forgive them instead as it would be better for me in my heart and in my faith to do so. For these reasons, I believe Alaa is truly a purely good person, and I hope that you will consider giving her a more lenient sentence.

Thank you for your time,

Ayah Abusaad

From:

Noor Abusaad

621 61st Street

Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35405

12/25/2021

To:

Judge L. Scott Coogler

United States District Court

Northern District of Alabama

2005 University Blvd.

Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

I am writing this letter on behalf of my sister Alaa Abusaad. As someone who has grown up with Alaa, I can say she is a very smart, kindhearted, and funny person. She always makes us laugh and goes out of her way to help others and always tries her best. I remember times when she would stay after school, working in clubs and other times when she would sit in her room all day studying. She would also do a lot of tutoring and volunteering. She would tell me about how she helped students with subjects such as math. She took a lot of AP classes and even worked for a short time during her summer break.

I never heard her curse or say any bad words even when she was angry or stressed out. She was very supportive during times when I was down, especially after I was in an accident. She told me to be patient and to not get upset at the person who hit my car. I still remember her telling me that I should just pray for them and for myself and not feel upset about what happened.

I can confirm in all the time that I have known Alaa that she is a good person who tries her best and loves to help others. Please take these things into consideration when deciding on Alaa's sentencing.

Ebrahim Abusaad
314 Carr Ave.
Homewood, AL 35209

January 2, 2021

The Honorable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

My name is Ebrahim Abusaad, Alaa Abusaad is my younger sister; I've known Alaa her whole life. I've watched her grow up to be the person she is today, a kind and caring person. Alaa was one of the few people that could always make me laugh no matter what I was going through. When Alaa started college, there was a semester that I would drive her home since our last classes of the day finished around the same time; we would stop at Walgreens for candy, since she really loved candy, and I remember us laughing so much on our drives home because of the jokes she would make. I remember when our oldest sister went off to college in another state, Alaa couldn't afford to buy her a parting gift so she wrote her letters to look back at and smile if she ever missed us and drew her pictures of us and put them all in an envelope and gave them to her when she left. Even though she was sad that my oldest sister was leaving she was always smiling. She would cry herself to sleep every night for a week after my sister left, but never in front of her because she didn't want her feeling bad. Growing up Alaa was easily the smallest one of us physically, I guess that's why it was easy for people to pick on her when we were children, but even then she would not hold a grudge against anyone or try to hurt them back. She is truly the sweetest and most kind person you could ever meet. It's hard to believe the situation she's in now, she's intelligent, hard working, and a kind person. And I hope you can take that into consideration and grant her leniency.

Sincerely,

Ebrahim Abusaad

From: Huda Abusaad
621 61st St
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

December 29, 2021

To: The Honorable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: Character Reference Letter to Court

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

My name is Huda Abusaad. I'm Alaa's sister, her junior by around two years. I speak to Alaa over the phone often, varying between at least twice a week and up to twice a day. I can tell that this whole situation has been extremely difficult, stressful, and nerve-wracking for both her and her family (me included). It has been a detriment to our emotional, financial, and spiritual health. But regardless, we still hope for the best possible outcome so that my sister's extraordinary and bright future won't be upended. I genuinely believe that Alaa is a good person, a smart individual, and a diligent hard worker. Going through school and having the same teachers she has had before me showed me the impact of her character on others. Every teacher that knew her or taught her would sing her praises of how hardworking and smart she is. She was a part of the national honor society and Beta Club, where she would stay after school and tutor kids who were struggling with their classes. I remember she volunteered to help hide Easter eggs for a children's egg hunt at the Bryant-Denny stadium. She loves children and always had a soft spot for them. It seems like most of her volunteer work was centered around them, whether it was helping them decorate quilts or volunteering at Sunday schools she honestly seemed to enjoy her time working with kids. If she wasn't pursuing an education and career in geology, I think she would have chosen a career path in childcare. I hope that you can please consider giving Alaa a lenient sentence because she has always been an amazing person and a great sister to me. She is

someone who tries to lighten the mood and make me laugh. She also puts a lot of effort into helping me be successful in school and encourages me to continue when it's hard and I feel like I'm struggling. She helps me brainstorm and think of solutions when I'm stuck trying to decide on how to keep pushing forward when I stumble or mess up on my way to reaching my long term career goals. She has been so helpful and caring to me as a sister, to her friends and family, and to the community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

With much sincerity, Huda Abusaad

From: Tasneem Abusaad
615 61st St
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

December 27, 2021

To: The Honorable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: Character Reference Letter to Court

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

My name is Tasneem Abusaad, I am writing this letter to provide a character reference in regards to Alaa Abusaad. I am Alaa's older sister, and I have known her for as long as I can remember. The first time I met her was when my parents brought her home as a newborn, when I was four years old. Since then we have grown up together and I have seen her grow into a compassionate and beautiful soul. Alaa loves helping others, whether it is as simple as feeding the stray cats in the neighborhood, or doing whatever volunteer work she can find that helps children. I have so many fond memories with my little sister. I would describe her as a fun and energetic person who always lights up a room when she enters. Alaa and I would go shopping together, she loved fashion as much as I did and knew how to put outfits together well; she would always get compliments on how well she dressed when she was in high school. She would always have a big smile on her face and would try to entertain us with jokes, her laugh was contagious and you couldn't help but smile when in her presence. I remember her making me laugh when we were shopping at the mall by grabbing different items like funny sunglasses and putting them on while making funny faces. She wrote me many fun cards when I was leaving for college to make the goodbyes easier for both of us.

I remember many times that Alaa would ask me to drop her off or pick her up from volunteer work that she did in school and around the local community. I also remember dropping her off at the Native American festival and when I picked her up she couldn't stop talking about how much she enjoyed working at the children's booth and how happy the children seemed to be. Alaa was always very intelligent and studious. I remember dropping her off at the University of Alabama for a summer long competition she was a part of when she was in high school; and later I found out that her group won. I had to also drop her off and pick her up from her work, which was also at the UA. Alaa also received a scholarship to the University she attended after attending the UA.

Alaa had just gotten married, and would frequently talk about the life she wanted to live and how she hoped to help children in need. She would also talk about how she wanted to have children of her own one day after completing her studies and doing more volunteer work. She wanted to study and work; but most of all she wished to help others in her community. It saddened her to see people who were homeless or to see people in need. Alaa has so much light and love to give to this world and always wanted to better our society. These past few years have been extremely difficult and heartbreaking for our family but especially for Alaa. It has also been extremely difficult for the family financially. Alaa has been very remorseful and only wants the chance to do good and help children and people in need. I hope that you can take all that into consideration and grant her the opportunity to pursue her true aspirations of helping others and trying to better our community and society.

From: Yahya Abusaad
621 61st St
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405

January 1, 2021

To: The Honorable L. Scott Coogler
United States District Court
Northern District of Alabama
2005 University Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Dear Judge L. Scott Coogler,

I am Yahya Abusaad and I am writing a reference letter for Alaa Abusaad. I am Alaa's younger brother and I have known her my entire life. She has always been there whenever any of us needed her. I have always looked up to Alaa because she is a wise and caring person. I could tell she always wanted the best for me and would try to help me decide what classes I needed to take for my college courses and would always give me advice for school and would encourage me when I needed it. In my opinion the best part about my sister is her sense of humor and how she would make plenty of jokes. I know she has done a lot of volunteer work to try to help the community as much as she can. When my sister Alaa got married I would have never believed that she would be away from us for this long. I miss her very much and hope that you can consider her good character and qualities. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Yahya Abusaad