

# *Freedom Fighters & Prison Consultants*

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## When writing a letter to the President for Clemency

Before you get started, know that timing is everything. If this is the first time a prisoner is filing, they should have exhausted all of their appeals before seeking executive clemency.

Also, these are TIPS to help people navigate the process, but there is no absolute RULE so keep that in mind when reading the following:

### **YOU CAN...**

Write to either The Pardon Attorney, Rosalind Sargent-Burns, Deputy Pardon Attorney, the President, or both! In previous administrations everyone had to file through the Office of the Pardon Attorney. However, the Trump administration has signaled they are willing to take submissions sent directly to the White House. This was also implied by Alan Dershowitz in an article published in Washington Examiner, entitled: [Alan Dershowitz says anyone can get clemency from Trump...](#) So we currently recommend that you write directly to President Trump and provide to the petitioner with your letter (or a copy) so they can include in their clemency packages.

### **DO...**

Use the proper letter format. DO NOT DOUBLE SPACE a letter. Double spacing is used in motions, legal briefs, etc. not in letters. We use the format where everything is flush on the left margin. Date goes first, then the name and address of the person you are sending the letter to, such as:

*(fill in the date)*

*President Donald Trump  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington DC 20500*

**RE: Clemency Petition for John/Jane Doe (It is important to identify the applicant your letter refers to either here, and/or in the first sentence of the first paragraph.)**

Dear President Trump,

## DO...

Use the first paragraph to get directly to the point...

*I am writing in support of John/Jane Doe's clemency petition because I firmly believe a commutation of (First name, as in John's) sentence would be in the best interest of our society, justice, the taxpayer, and last but not least, the family members, friends and loved ones who continue to suffer each day that John/Jane remains incarcerated. (Establish how much time has already been served.) John has already completed 18 years on a 30 year sentence and paid dearly for his crime. (Make it your own – this is just an example...you can expand or be more specific.)*

## DON'T...

Waste time on sentences that don't matter – such as “I know you are busy...” or “I'm sure you get a lot of letters...” that's their job and there's no reason in stating the obvious. Just get to the point and make every sentence pertain to John/Jane Doe and why they deserve to be chosen out of tens of thousands of applicants.

## DO...

Use the second paragraph to establish your connection to the prisoner, if you have one and/or explain why they deserve clemency.

*John is my cousin, brother, husband, son... (Or) I have known John since the third grade...we grew up together and played sports/basketball/? or s/he was a very good student, etc. You may know some hardships this person went through, as in domestic violence, or trauma – if so, you can share.*

*(Create a positive, healthy image.) I always remember John as being a very compassionate person, that cared deeply about family...etc. (Add more reasons why you think John/Jane deserves clemency) John/Jane has taken advantage of many programs offered by the BOP and has a clear record of conduct. (give all reasons they have earned clemency) Not only does John deserve clemency, but his children deserve to reunite with their father/mother who were only 3 and 7 when s/he went to prison... (Or) Jane's mother is in ill health and my concern is that she may pass away before Jane is released, which deprives a mother and daughter of a very important bond in the evolution of their relationship. I can't imagine the anguish I would feel if I could not be at my mother's side – the very person who brought me into this world – at the moment when she will depart.*

## DO...

Use the third paragraph to summarize:

*I want to commend you for proving that you truly care about people who were over-prosecuted during the 90s when African Americans were sentenced under the prejudicial 100 to 1 crack cocaine disparity. So many worthy people are coming home due to the First Step Act that you supported and signed into law on 12/21/2018. But that new law, as great as it is, will not free \_\_\_\_\_ add name of prisoner) She needs the same mercy you gave Alice Marie Johnson. Please give strong consideration to John/Jane's clemency petition and find them worthy of your mercy. (or if letter is to Sargent-Burns) I pray you will submit \_\_\_\_\_'s petition with a favorable recommendation to the President for his approval and that he will have mercy on my (friend, cousin, or mother) ... Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this extremely*

*important matter that has the potential to favorably impact many lives. (Again, expand on this – write from the heart.)*

*(If you are willing to offer the prisoner a job, or if they will be living with you or if you will help support them – please STATE that to help establish they have a strong support system when they come home.)*

*Sincerely yours,*

**(Hit return 4 times and sign your name in this empty space, above your typed name.)**

## **DO...**

Have someone review the letter before you send it to catch any errors and provide feedback. It doesn't have to be perfect, but fresh eyes will catch typos. If you don't have anyone to preview it, go ahead and send.

## **DON'T...**

Provide details of the prisoner's case. Let them do that in their petition. I had someone write, "Amy was completely innocent..." and I'm sure they think they were helping me. I was NOT completely innocent and I admitted to my role in the conspiracy. According to the conspiracy statute, if someone furthers the conspiracy one step, we are guilty for the entire scope of the conspiracy – it's not fair, but that's the law and until we change it, we are guilty. So, please don't provide details of a prisoner's case that you may or may not be clear about, as it may contradict what is in their petition. You can refer to it as a case of injustice, but just be careful about trying to make the case FOR the petitioner. That's why you should personalize this letter as one coming from YOU, and why YOU would like to see justice served by encouraging the President to grant clemency – or if writing the – Pardon Attorney – to ask that he submit a favorable recommendation to the President to grant the prisoner's clemency petition.

## **DO...**

End the letter by adding your collective voice as someone who will personally benefit if John/Jane is released and if they will have a positive impact on your life – explain how. If you don't know John then get creative with how society will benefit. If you are someone who will provide aide to John post-release, state that you would hire John if he needs employment, and/or if you are part of a large support group that will assist Jane in her re-entry process with whatever tools s/he may need to succeed, such as a job, financial aide, computer, etc.

Again, each case is different, some people have large families that will fill that gap – others don't – so use your judgement and work with others you know are writing letters. Cover all the bases to ease any concern as to how this person will survive, if released. We want to establish the prisoner will have every tool they need to succeed, and be a productive citizen/asset to society if afforded this rare opportunity.

## **DON'T...**

Get on a soapbox about the drug war or a particular type of drug that you believe should not be illegal. If this is a marijuana case, it is ok to point out that marijuana has been legalized several states and public opinion has changed drastically – but be careful. This is not the time to carry on about public policy or your personal opinion. Just be logical, fair, and respectful.

**I hope these tips have been helpful.**