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Hon. David A. Paterson
Governor, NYS
Executive Chambers State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

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Sir,

My name is Rabbi Michel Chill and I have been a Chaplain for the Department of Correctional Services for about fifteen years. I am writing this letter in support of early release and or Commutation of sentence for Richard Berger, who is currently housed at the Green Haven Correctional Facility.

I first became aware of Richard Berger, as he was a congregant of the Green Haven general population, where I was assigned to perform my duties.

At first, what I had to go on, were only the files left behind by my predecessors Rabbi Morgenstern and Rabbi Liebowitz, who were the Rabbis' here when Richard was here.

There were two (2) letters from outside Rabbis', attesting to his family and Religion, and one letter from Rabbi Goodman, the Rabbi at Sullivan Correctional Facility, (where Richard was housed in 1986-87 recommending that he come to Green Haven to participate in the Kosher Food Program (at that time, the only place that served kosher food for Jewish inmates), it is still the only place that serves Hot Meals for them.

They described him as Jewish, both Mother and Father, observant, in that he came to services and contributed during discussions, and also that he ran the Jewish Charity Group, for not only this prison, but for five (5) or six (6) other prisons as well. At the time, I did not know what the Charity Group was, but I have since learned and wholly agree with all that it stands for (which I will explain later in this letter).

After only a few months here, I received a call from Richards' lawyer, he had gotten a reversal on one of his convictions, and was getting ready for a new trial. The lawyer asked me to write out a brief note, explaining to the Judge, about Jewish Observances, as the new Trial was going to take place around Rosh Hashana (our Jewish New Year) and Richard, because of his Religious observance, did not want to start

Goodman, who was the Rabbi for Sullivan, Shawangunk, Wallkill and Woodbourne Correctional facilities, and the work that Richard and his band of like minded men did. I also received a call from the Salvation Army Coordinator, who only had good things to say about Richard, and that Richard had been the one steady rock of the Jewish Charity Group these last twenty years. This man Rick Fitzwater, who has been the coordinator for eight (8) years, had taken over from Chuck Cook, who was on the job for the previous thirteen (13) years, who also only had good things to say about Richard. Rabbi Matasar, who handles Upstate prisons also called and said he used the services of the Group, and would I tell Richard to send them more cards. The same from Rabbi Charitonov and Rabbi Karnofsky both of whom used the good services of the Jewish Charity Group at prisons in the western part of the state.

Richard now leads the group, as he has been in prison now for 24 (twenty-four) years. Some of the men who brought him in are still around, but no longer take an active part with the group. And while there are new Jewish men inside, very few want to take an active part in Chessed (kindness) and good works ((Mitzvahs), as they don't see any benefit to themselves. Originally, it was only meant to be for the two (2) or three (3) prisons where Jewish men tended to go, but the idea caught on, and now some fifteen receive Greeting cards, that they distribute to the Jewish men at no cost. At this facility, any member of the general population that writes to my office can receive up to four (4) cards at no cost to themselves per month. Also, those men in SHU and IPC Care can write to me if they have no funds, and we provide stamped envelopes with the cards, on an as needed basis.

Richard and his group also provide cards to the other denominations as well! This too, is at no cost to the men or the state! When he gets cards from some of the big vendors, there are usually "Catholic" or other Christain fellowship cards among them. Richard contacts the Reverend (Protestant) and Father (Catholic) to arrange to donate these to them.

Richard didn't start doing this with one year or two years to go before being eligible for release, or with the objective that this would look good on his resume. This has been an on-going concern that he has only made better, and helps continue to thrive. I am sure he will continue with this group even after his release.

~~This is not to say that he has only done the Jewish~~ Charity Group work, not by any means. He also has close to 100 (one-Hundred) certificates for AVP, the Alternatives to Violence Program, where he started off in 1991 as just a participant of the course, to becoming a Gold Certificate

holder and Facilitator of the AVP Program. Most recently at Wende Correctional facility, where from 2002 through 2006 He was a team leader and base for them holding up to ten (10) AVP sessions a year! These three (3) day courses help to build personality and confidence in ones self, and bring matters of stress and confusion, into thoughtful learning experiences, so that violence can be left behind.

In addition to that, he also received and later taught the Legal Research Course. His Certificates from the State, and Buffalo Law School, allow him to help those less fortunate then himself in preparing and understanding the finer points of the Legal System, so that they may possibly help themselves in the long run. They can now write and prepare papers and motions that they couldn't begin to understand before.

I feel very strongly for his situation, and I believe that he is a changed man from when he first came into the system, nearly a quarter of a century ago. The system knows that recidivism is lessened over time, and I am sure that Richard would not come back after being released. His family and friends are a big support network, and they have been with him his entire time inside. He has some medical issues, but who doesn't nowadays. He will not be on any public doles or rolls for assistance out in the world.

I believe that he would make it outside with no problems and that I hope you will consider his case for Commutation or early release. Although he plans to help his family in their businesses, I have also spoken to other Rabbis' who have taken an interest in Richards welfare, and they assure me that they too, would find a place for him upon release, if needed. He has shown them that he is firmly in control of himself, and that his good works are not for show, but a true example of Chessed that they could and would put to good use in their own organizations.

Respectfully Submitted,

