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Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center
CN 221 D
21425A Spring Street Union Grove, WI 53182
January 13, 2019
Mrs. Peggy Swan
Forum For Understanding Prisons 29631 Wild Rose Drive
Blue River, WI 53518
Dear Mrs. Swan:

I was asked to contact you about a week ago because of the good works you're doing regarding prison reform. I wished I'd had computer access at the time I wrote. I hate for anyone to have to read my handwriting; I hope you were able to make out my scribble.

I have a computer for a few minutes this morning and thought I would touch base with you First, I just want to thank you for your efforts in this important cause I've been incarcerated (rightfully so) for approximately 29 years, and know firsthand the ins and outs of the prison system from my perspective.

I was incarcerated for robbery and homicide. I take full responsibility for my actions and am under no illusions that freedom is a right. I can say for certain that I'm not the girl who walked in, and I readily admit that prison saved my life Without going into details that are decades old, I will say that when I got to Taycheedah I knew it was the opportunity to make changes. I didn't want to ever get to the point where I'd be considered for release and have nothing to show for my incarceration, except the length of time I had served. I served every day trying to become a better person.

My efforts leaned toward education. I got involved in every ducational opportunity I could, and though I worked full time throughout my incarceration, and still do, my goals were always geared to higher education. After much time and effort I graduated from the University Wisconsin system with a bachelor's degree in business administration. It was difficult, challenging, and worth it. When I completed my bachelor's degree I was allowed, encouraged even, to enroll in a vocational program that was offered at ICI. I completed the Office Software Applications vocational program through Moraine Park Technical College in 2016. I was interested in furthering my education beyond a bachelor's degree and decided to research master's degree programs It's very difficult for students to pursue college degrees in the Wisconsin prison system because of financing, the lack of online options, etc It was imperative that I find a master's program that was offered in a print based delivery. I was successful, and with the permission of the education director at Taycheedah at the time, Mr. Gary Grueter, I applied. After a lengthy process I was accepted. I was encouraged to enroll. It was even discussed at my parole hearing that August. Since then I've continued to progress through the program. My goal of course, is to graduate with a Masters in Business

Administration (MBA). I will not fall short of that goal, whether it's on the inside or outside.

My education has opened doors and offered opportunities, including being invited by a University of Oshkosh communications professor to co-author an article regarding the benefits of a higher education in the prison system. I happily took that on. We were thrilled to be chosen for publication. Our article will be published May 1, 2019 in the international journal Critical Education We're proud of our work and believe in the cause.

I believe so strongly in education at all levels that I always encourage those coming in behind me to put themselves first, and to do the right thing by investing in themselves, not the drugs, alcohol, abusive relationships, and life of crime that landed them in prison. I strongly encourage holding ourselves accountable and putting one step in front of the other to be a better person at the end of the day. I know some of these women are listening, not all, but some. I believe it's a worthy effort and hope to continue that line of work in some capacity whenever I am given the opportunity at release. I always try to be a positive role model.

I'm encouraged by the efforts of Governor Evers's administration and actually see hope in the eyes of some of these women who have been stifled by the policies of Scott Walker. I hope Governor Evers sees that some of these women want to work with him, not against him. I would be honored to help him in any way I can, whether I'm released or not.

To that end, I am scheduled to see the parole board again in May of this year. I don't have any illusions that I'll be released, I've always been told I haven't served enough time. I don't know what enough time is. Regardless, I think it's important to note that I haven't received opposition to my release, not even from the victim's family. I personally asked the parole commissioner at one time if there was filed opposition in my case. He said it was his policy to not share correspondence from victims, which I respect, but he did say "your file is pretty clean". I take that to mean that they have not formally opposed any progression that I'm offered.

While the governor and his team consider policy changes and reform I hope they look at those of us who can be, and are willing to be, ambassadors in the effort to save our youth through education, hard work, and accountability. I preach that we must leave our incarceration as better people, responsible, and proud of who we are. We must earn our place in society and deserve to be there. I believe I am only one of those people. I am not the criminal and detriment to society that I once was. My personal belief is that corrections serves two purposes: punishment and rehabilitation. It's a disservice to the taxpayers of this state to expect anything less. To use prison as a human warehouse is a waste of money, I believe Governor Evers sees that and will make efforts to roll back those policies.

Thank you very much for your time and effort, it's, worthwhile beyond words. Sincerely,
Karen Lehman

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