

July 2, 2018

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington D.C. 20500

RE: Clemency for Michelle West #17809-039

Dear Mr. President,

I have known Michelle West since about 2014, when she was incarcerated in Brooklyn, and we've been exchanging emails ever since. She is a woman of extraordinary dignity and principle who should not be denied her freedom! Her "cruel and unusual punishment" of "two lifetimes plus fifty years" is a glaring example of the grotesque irrationality of the judge who delivered that ludicrous sentence. How can anyone serve TWO lifetimes? Such a sentence makes a mockery of any system claiming to be just.

As the daughter of immigrants from Ireland, I was raised during the Great Depression and was fortunate to live in the United States, where my family and my school friends really did live the American dream. My generation believed, with all our hearts, that "America was making the world safe for democracy" (the mantra that was burned into all our psyches) and we observed first-hand that children willing to work hard were able to do better than their parents. How things have changed - but certainly not for the better!

As a teacher for forty years, I insisted that my students proudly recite the Pledge of Allegiance with the indelible phrase "liberty and justice for all", in which I had ample reason to fervently believe because I was surrounded by parents, teachers, friends, acquaintances who lived in accordance with the principles on which this country was founded.

Sadly, in recent years, my naive notions have been shattered by reality, and I've come to the realization that individuals who acquire power are not always unfailingly principled. All too often, those with power abuse it. Too often, institutions become corrupt and that's the reason that Michelle West has been imprisoned for more than a quarter of a century and that her daughter, Miquelle, has had to be in touch daily - by phone - with her mother. Corruption ripples out like lava and destroys lives.

In recent months, Michelle has had some devastating disappointments. A college team was unable to pursue her case and a law firm, from whom we had hoped to receive pro bono support, didn't come through. Those of us on the Michelle West Team were crushed, but Michelle rallied and assured us that we must persist. That's a sample of her indomitable spirit! Until Michelle West, and all others unjustly confined, are free, not one of us is truly free.

Today, more than ever, our country needs Michelle West because she's a person who sets good example and uses her time and talents to help others. We know that is the case from comments made by many women, with whom she has served time, and from staff members, who have observed her over the years. Michelle West should be freed not only for her own sake but for the sake of the community at large. Let's hope, in this instance, that our US Justice Department lives up to its name!

Sincerely,

Pat McSweeney

Pat McSweeney
Taunton, MA