



Indiana Federal Community Defenders

Letters of Support Guidelines

These letters are a very important part of the sentencing process because they help the judge get to know the person they are sentencing in ways other than just the facts of the offense. In our district, ***all*** of the judges read ***all*** of the letters submitted and frequently comment upon them before they sentence the defendant. Here are some guidelines to help you as you write a letter of support:

- The letter should be addressed to the judge but mailed to the defendant's attorney or mitigation specialist. The attorney will file the letter with the court. We file everything together at once, so there are not several separate filings.
- Who are you? Introduce yourself to the court. Explain how you know (and how long you have known) the defendant.
- Make it personal. When explaining who the person is as you know them, examples help make the point.
- Only talk about what you know. Limit yourself to things for which you have personal knowledge.
- If you are writing a letter of support for sentencing, guilt is already decided. There is no need to discuss the facts of the offense.
- Never attack the victims or law enforcement. This does not help.
- Never allow the defendant or anyone else to write the letter for you.
- If appropriate, detail how you will be part of the defendant's support system following sentencing. Research shows that defendants with strong systems of support have a better likelihood for successful rehabilitation.
- Be concise. Be Sincere. One page is sufficient.
- Sign and date the letter. If you have questions, contact the lawyer.