

Date

Honorable [Insert Judges Full Name]

[Address of the Court]

Re: [insert client name]

Dear Judge [Insert Last Name]:

I am writing on behalf of my client [insert name here] in regards to sentencing in your courtroom on [insert date here]. The intent of this letter is to ask you to consider the importance of the breastfeeding relationship between my client and her child when determining sentencing. I have briefly outlined some information that may be helpful to you in this case.

Breastfeeding is not a lifestyle choice: it is a public health issue for families in our society and widely recognized as the optimal method for feeding and nurturing children. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding until at least two years of age, the American Academy of Family Physicians for at least 12 months, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life with continuation of breastfeeding for up to 1 year or longer as mutually desired by mother and child.

The benefits of breastfeeding include both nutritional value and disease protection for as long as breastfeeding continues. Breastfeeding boosts the immune system through the cells, hormones, and antibodies found in breastmilk. Breastfeeding results in a lower infant mortality rate, providing protection against many illnesses, including diarrhea, pneumonia, gastrointestinal disease, ear infections, and upper respiratory infections, especially during the first year of life.

In addition to these health benefits, breastfeeding promotes social and emotional development as well. Breastfeeding contributes to positive maternal self-image and development of a stable, nurturing maternal-infant relationship. The emotional security and warmth developed within the breastfeeding relationship promotes an early and secure attachment for the child, which is central to subsequent development. To protect these relationships of attachment is part of the general societal responsibility to protect the very young. Research demonstrates a significant link between the duration a child is breastfed and the more socially adjusted they are as 6- to 8-year olds.

Expressing milk is a serious medical need and cessation of breastfeeding poses health risks for the incarcerated individual. If appropriate medical care is not provided any and all of the following could occur: mastitis (breast infection), decrease in milk supply; unintended weaning; physical pain from engorgement (inflammation of the breasts); and emotional distress. For incarcerated individuals, breastfeeding promotes maternal-infant attachment and improves health for mother and child.

I ask that you please consider the research presented within when making recommendations on the sentencing for this particular case in order for breastfeeding to continue. Alternatives include a community halfway house; house arrest; probation options; delayed sentencing; and family-based treatment. At minimum, please ensure access to a breast pump and allow regularly scheduled times for milk expression, provide for safe and sanitary storage of the expressed milk until collected by the child's caregiver, and consider requests to have the child brought to be nursed during regular visiting hours. Thank you.

Respectfully yours,

[Insert your Name]