

September 23, 2019

RE: Letter of Recommendation for Brendan Dassey

Dear Governor Evers:

I am a licensed clinical social worker at the Bluhm Legal Clinic of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, where my responsibilities include working with individuals involved with the justice system. In that role, I help uncover our clients' life histories, address any trauma they may have suffered, develop their potential for rehabilitation, and identify any interventions required to assist in ensuring public safety. I also work to ensure that my clients receive the structural, relational, educational, and emotional support necessary while incarcerated and actively work to facilitate their positive and successful reintegration back into their community upon release.

I have been working with Brendan Dassey as part of his legal team since July 2016. Since that time, I have spoken to Brendan on a weekly basis, ensuring that he is receiving the necessary support, discussing coping skills such as visual meditation techniques, breathing exercises, and encouraging hope and positivity. I also visit Brendan a few times a year. I can safely say that I have truly been able to get to know him as a person.

Unlike most of my clients, where our conversations focus on managing behaviors and dealing with anger, my conversations with Brendan are drastically different. With Brendan, the focus is invariably on basic, everyday matters like the food he likes to eat, the books he is reading, the shows he is watching, and the things that bring him joy like Pokémon and whatever pictures he is coloring. These conversations, compared to my work with other clients, are very simple to say the least, and they reflect both his limitations and his extremely gentle personality. Each time I speak with Brendan via phone, we end our conversation with a discussion of three positive things that happened to him in the past few days as a way to instill hope and positivity – and he never hesitates in naming three things that have brought him joy, even things as simple as having a hamburger for dinner or talking to his mom. It is the smallest and simplest things in life -- things

that most of us take for granted -- that fuel Brendan's positivity and clearly demonstrate that he is content with having very little.

Over the past couple of years, I have come to see what a caring, compassionate, helpful, responsible and easygoing individual he is. For example, prior to being transferred to Oshkosh, Brendan took a great deal of pride in his various positions as a tier tender at Columbia Correctional Facility. He was pleased that he was able to do the job correctly. Brendan prides himself on making sure the shower areas are cleaned and is quick to tell me when he had to correct the work of others if it was not up to his standards. Brendan also volunteers to help out other inmates on his unit with their job assignments when they are not feeling well and assists inmates who are confined to wheelchairs with cleaning and transportation. Brendan lends a hand simply to be kind and never expects or asks for any benefit to himself beyond the satisfaction of helping others. Brendan even donates his own money to different fundraisers held by the prison. It makes him feel good to know that he is doing something positive and making a contribution to society as a whole.

As the Governor may be aware, Brendan's case has had several major ups and downs. Numerous times, Brendan has hoped to be released, only to experience disappointment and find himself still incarcerated. At no point has Brendan shown even a glimpse of anger. He merely states that he feels disappointment but continues to hold a childlike hope that one day he will be free. Brendan is someone who continues to believe, trust, and have faith that the right thing will be done. In my experience, as someone who works with wrongfully incarcerated individuals, this is an exceptional attitude. Many wrongly convicted individuals understandably feel distrust of the system along with anger and disappointment – but Brendan has never shown such feelings for a moment. Part of this may be explained by Brendan's extraordinarily positive coping skills in which he keeps himself busy with things he enjoys to do, like coloring angels, reading comic books, crocheting (in the past), exercising, and taking phone calls and visiting with family and friends.

Despite the fact that he is in prison with a life sentence, I have never experienced a phone call with Brendan when he does not ask about my family and how I am doing. I appreciate this so much about him. Family is so important to him and he looks forward to the weekly visits from his parents. He also talks to me about his dreams of having his own family one day and what he would name his children. It is my greatest wish for Brendan to be able to experience being a parent one day, as I think he would be a loving and one-of-a-kind dad.

As a clinician, Brendan's character is one that easily builds healthy human connections and prosocial behaviors. This makes him very capable of developing professional relationships which would easily translate over to personal relationships as well. I can confidently say that Brendan would not harm or be a danger to himself or others if granted clemency.

As a social worker, and as someone who believes in human dignity, change, and justice, I ask the Governor for mercy on behalf of Brendan Dassey. This young adult, who has basically been raised by the prison system, has succeeded in so many ways despite overwhelming odds and setbacks. He deserves a chance at life and family. I ask that we show Brendan the same compassion that he shows others by granting him his well-deserved freedom.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kmyk', written in a cursive style.

Kasia Majerczak, MSW, LCSW
Social Worker, Bluhm Legal Clinic

September 20, 2019

Dear Governor Evers:

I am a graduate social work student who has interned with the Bluhm Legal Clinic of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. Since October of 2018, I have worked with Brendan Dassey as part of his legal team. Though my therapeutic relationship with him has been more recent, I have gained an understanding of who Brendan is through our semiweekly phone conversations and feel confident in my ability to speak to his character and ability to re-enter society successfully.

Brendan finds joy in whatever small ways he can while being incarcerated; activities such as a TV season finale or special chicken dinner are the kinds of things that make his day. We have talked at length about his favorite movies, TV shows, books, comic book series, and more, and he's always quick to share the latest developments from the various storylines. A few months ago, he was able to purchase an iPad which has been an incredibly useful tool that has allowed Brendan to download apps that are both fun and educational, including one that he hopes will help him learn to play the piano. In addition to gaming and educational apps, Brendan is able to read all kinds of books and is no longer constrained to only the prison library. Brendan and I discuss the music he's listening to, what he's reading, and how his day-to-day activities are going, among other things. If anything is ever new, interesting, or concerning, Brendan is comfortable sharing it with his team and asking for help when issues arise.

Brendan looks forward to visits from family, friends, and supporters and is truly appreciative of the time and energy people spend to see him. Due to the public nature of his case, there are often new names and faces popping into his life, and Brendan responds to those who reach out with sincere appreciation and friendship. While other people in his situation may withdraw from or distrust this kind of engagement, Brendan gains strength from knowing that so many people want the best for him and enjoys hearing their stories.

Had I not been filled in on the history of Brendan's case prior to beginning my therapeutic relationship with him, I would have never known how tumultuous it has been, as his disposition is consistently optimistic and level-headed. Even after facing numerous and disappointing setbacks, Brendan remains hopeful, considerate, and understanding of his circumstances. His response to both positive and negative developments demonstrates his maturity and grace. Having learned to manage his expectations, Brendan has decided to focus his energy instead on staying safe, productive, and helpful to others while incarcerated.

Having been able to get to know Brendan since last October, I can say with confidence that he will do well as a free and contributing member of society, as evidenced by his connection with family and friends, his commitment to learning, and his ability to make the best of incredibly difficult situations.

Sincerely,

Allison Banks

Allison Banks, MSW