

Mary Virginia Oberle

March 13,2023

RE Rafael Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

This letter is in regard to Rafael Rondon. Rafael's father, Christopher Rondon, is my cousin. We grew up in a small family that is very close. Holidays and summers were often spent at Rafeal's paternal grandparents home, who are my Aunt and Uncle.. My Aunt Pat is my fathers only sibling. My Uncle Tony grew up very poor in Venezuela and traveled to Spain with his brother to attend college and they became physicians. My Uncle then came to the United States to pursue his specialty and complete his internship in medicine. President John F. Kennedy granted him his citizenship.

In 1973 I moved from Cleveland to live with my Aunt and Uncle to attend school to become a registered nurse. Upon graduation I began my career near where I attended college. It is during this time that my relationship with my cousins and their parents flourished. We were more like siblings than cousins. So as years passed my cousins married, had children and moved all over the United States. We maintained our relationships through phone calls and visits to their homes or Rafael's grandparents home.

Rafael was a sweet boy who had a wonderful relationship with his parents and sister Isabella. He adored his grandparents and his Aunts, Uncles and cousins. Oftentimes during summer break cousins from Arizona and New York would fly to meet and spend time with their grandparents

and cousins living in Ohio. Their relationships would build over the years continuing the family bond.

Rafael was a smart boy who had a fondness for physics and numbers. His heart's desire at that time was to go to college and become a Pharmacist. Soon after high school graduation tragedy struck when Rafael was visiting friends in Manhattan. He went to step out onto a fire escape, missed his step and fell 7 stories landing prone on the cement. He had broken both arms, wrist, ribs, femur, pelvis and his jaw was shattered into pieces. In the Emergency Room he had a cardiac arrest three times and he was brought back to life each time. Rafael's parents took turns and drove 5-6 hours to New York City to be there for Rafael during his 27 surgeries. He was in severe pain, his face swollen, bruised and disfigured from his multiple facial fractures. They say that bone pain is the worst type of pain.

Rafael suffered from severe depression due his pain and disfigurement. His jaw was wired closed because of the severe facial fractures. Most teeth were missing; much later he would need dental implants. Physical Therapy was painful and a challenge to say the least. Would he be able to walk? Would he be able to feed himself? One day when scheduled for one of his later surgeries his father Chris was asked to come into his sons hospital room. There he found Rafael standing on his bed against the wall crying telling his father he just could not go through another surgery. It was obvious to me Rafael suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His surgery was postponed to a later date.

Rafael was discharged from the hospital to a Rehabilitation center in New York City so that he could continue his follow up appointments with his multiple trauma doctors. His best friend in Rehab was a gentleman 65 years of age who listened and encouraged Rafael through his uphill battle.

Months after the accident Raphael was discharged home. There he saw a dental surgeon in Syracuse for his dental implants. While he was home he worked part time for his fathers company. He also helped his maternal grandmother who was now alone after the death of her husband,

Rafael's maternal grandfather. Rafael would drive 30 minutes to her home to take her to her doctor appointments that were an hour away. He would cook for her, help clean the home and do chores that were needed to be completed around her home. Rafael shared a mutual admiration and love for his grandmother.

There is also Uncle Larry who is visually impaired and has Diabetes. Rafael would go grocery shopping for him and take Uncle Larry to his doctor appointments in Buffalo. Again Rafael helped his uncle around his home and would cook meals for him. Despite any discomfort Rafael may have had he was always ready to help those in his family that were in need.

Over the holidays I would see Rafael and now remember the concern we all had for him. He still suffered from depression and there were times I remember his parents would share through their tears, their concern that Rafael may take his own life. Myself as well as many family members, shared the love we had for him and how grateful we were to have him in our lives. His making it through all this was a miracle.

In late 2021 Rafael decided he wanted to pursue a career in welding and in March of 2022 he began school in Florida. He has been studying very hard and doing well in his classes. Ultimately he would like to do deep sea welding.

In 2022 tragedy struck his family once again. Rafael's beloved maternal grandmother suddenly passed away from Leukemia in early February and less than a week later his paternal grandfather passed away. The family drove to Ohio from New York after one funeral to attend another. Little did we know that my beloved Aunt, Rafael's paternal grandmother, would be diagnosed with stage 4 Colon Cancer late that summer. Over the holidays the family would gather to be with Rafael's grandmother. Often I would see him sitting close. They were sharing memories and sharing their love and admiration for each other. In late January 2023 Rafael's grandmother passed away. This has left a hole in our hearts. A whole generation gone in less than a year.

The adversities that Rafael has faced are more than many people I know. He has always been there to help and support others in need. He is compassionate and able to find his inner strength for himself and those he loves. I admire the tenacity of Rafael. He is a valuable member of our family and society. Rafael is a good person and I do hope that you will take all that this young man has been through over these years into consideration.

Respectfully,

Mary V. Oberle

[Attachment F]

Rafael is my first cousin Chris's son. My name is Mark Lauria. As I reside in Ohio & he in New York we don't have the opportunity to visit very often but stay in touch via Email & phone calls. Rafael since high school has talked-about being a Pharmacist & his desire never changed. He loves being outdoors & his parents have a place on the lake where the family spends much of their time in the summer boating & Jet Skiing & enjoying each other's company. His life & ours all changed in the Month of May, 2018 when he fell 5 stories from a fire escape. He was clinging to life suffering from a punctured lung, broken ribs, arm, hip, jaw, losing his teeth & countless other injuries. His recovery was in question & promised to be very slow with at least 20 or more surgeries in the future. He suffered far more than just the physical damage, he was suffering mentally. At this time I was receiving Radiation for cancer & like Rafael I too was questioning was it worth it ?? For me, Rafael gave me the encouragement & drive to keep Fighting., I hope for him, I did the same. After countless surgeries & many hours of Rehab he has been able to move forward, He Never Quit ! His resilience was a lesson for me to learn even being over 30 yrs. older. His dream of being a pharmacist was shattered that day but he never quit !! It hasn't been easy but With the love & encouragement from his family he is now enrolled in welding school & for the first time in a long time he looks forward to life. The immense courage & unabating will to not let this stop his ambitions Rafael displays, Please take this into consideration. Thank You !! Mark Lauria

February 27, 2023

Dear Judge Scullen,

Rafael is my nephew and I have known him his entire life.

Rafael has always been a good son, grandson and nephew within our small family. He was an honor student and excelled academically. He was involved with sports and enjoyed hunting and fishing with friends and our family.

After his accident, it took a long time for him to heal both physically and mentally. While he was unable to work or go to school he would drive to my mother's house, his grandmother, and spend time with her. As he was able he would help her the best he could around the house, mowing the lawn, helping her with her garden, taking her shopping and to many doctor's appointments. They were extremely close and shared a very strong bond. Unfortunately, she passed away suddenly in February of last year.

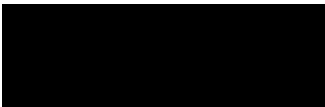
I am visually impaired, and Rafael has always been available to help me as well. He drove me many times to the VA in Syracuse for appointments and would also assist me with other appointments and my shopping.

I love Rafael and hope that you can understand how much he is needed within our family. His accident and recovery have been a very painful journey for Rafael, his sister Isabella and my sister and brother-in-law, Maryann and Chris. It has taken Rafael so long to make it this far and we are so proud of him for getting back on his feet and pursuing his welding certifications. He will be graduating this spring and we are all looking forward to him being able to experience a normal life after all of the pain and healing he has had to live through.

Sincerely,



Laurence Mooney



Monday, March 20, 2023
1:05 PM

Julieanne Hirschey

Regarding:
Rafael Christopher Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my relationship with Rafael with you.

I have known him since his birth and his parents have been dear friends of mine for over 30 years. This gives me the unique perspective of observing Rafael as he became a wonderful young man. He is loyal and very protective of his family. Rafael can light up a room with his charm and energy. On occasion he would perform after dinner with music, providing fun and merriment for everyone.

Sadly, Rafael has had some setbacks that have made his life challenging. He suffered a tragic fall in NYC in his late teens that required several surgeries to put him back together. The aftermath left him in chronic pain and in mental anguish. As a result he socially, physically, and mentally isolated himself from his peers. He had to overcome constant depression and find a way to function again. During this period his whole life revolved around his computer. He threw himself into gaming and social media.

Moving forward to present day, Rafael is participating in a college program to learn the skills he needs to begin his career.

He is doing well in school and making friends.

It's wonderful to see him engaging in life again.

I want you to know that Rafael is a wonderful, intelligent, and talented young man with a bright future. He will overcome his setbacks and find his way forward.

Thank you..

Sincerely,

Julie Hirschey

[Attachment B]

Dear Judge Scullin,

My name is Jacob Favret, currently a PhD candidate in neuroscience at the University at Buffalo and a former Watertown high school graduate. Rafael Rondon and I met through a mutual friend in middle school and bonded quickly; enough to accompany one another on family vacations. Therefore, I have been close with Rafael and his family for nearly 15 years and will strongly attest to his character.

From our first few encounters it stood out to me how Rafael was mature well beyond his age. He was always quick to greet parents/adults in a respectful manner and more than willing to offer up his service for tasks that were not required of him. Growing up in Watertown he has voluntarily helped shovel our driveway or been one of my parents' free laborers more than a handful of times. He is not one to complain and is a very headstrong individual. I believe with Rafael's motivation he can accomplish anything he puts his mind to.

Due to these characteristics of Rafael, the event of his accident was truly adverse, not only to his body but his mental wellbeing. Prior to the accident he was just taking his first steps into the world as an adult; moving away from home, living in New York city and experiencing life. The fact that all of his ambitions as well as most of his bones were suddenly crushed rightfully put Rafael in a dark state. While he laid at home healing his body we tried as best we could as friends to bring him any sliver of joy or reason to live. Moreover, just as he was beginning to step back out into the world the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic only further subjected Rafael to isolation as the world was all but shut down in the blink of an eye. Nonetheless, when he had no reason to live, when for years he felt isolated and alone Rafael persevered.

Our friend group had always been one to take in the great outdoors. And due to the pandemic, this was one of the few activities we still all got to take part in, Rafael included. Unfortunately for Rafael we don't take it easy when it comes to outdoor activities. From climbing the tallest mountain in the state. To wilderness camping trips that required carrying canoes plus gear for miles then paddling for many more Rafael always led the charge and hardly ever complained. There were many times where it was obvious that he was in immense pain but never once let us know it. He is truly unstoppable when he decides he is going to accomplish something.

It is of my opinion that Rafael was starting to recover to the extent where he is able to finally be a contributing member to society. He was taking steps to get any semblance of a normal life back in order. I was extremely proud when I learned he was heading to Florida to apprentice as a welder, I know he too was thrilled. Therefore, I would like to ask for leniency in the sentencing of Rafael. He has endured great pain and suffering in his life for many years already and was just now beginning to find himself in this world, I wish for him not to be resigned to any more years of solitude and confinement.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacob Favret". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jacob Favre



2/26/2023

Dear Judge Scullin,

I have had the pleasure of knowing Rafael Rondon since March of 2022 when he entered the Welding Technology program that I was teaching at Indian River State College located in Fort Pierce, FL.

Prior to attending my class, Rafael had reached out to me several months in advance to make sure he had all the necessary materials and equipment to be successful in the Welding program. This really stood out to me, and to his character, that he would have the due diligence to be prepared for class. Most students wait until the day of class to frantically figure out what they need and can often take several days to get it squared away. This model behavior continued throughout the course until my departure in June 2022.

When I first began teaching Rafael it was apparent that he was not very technical and that he had never really been challenged in his previous endeavors. Welding is both technical and challenging so this presented quite a bit of adversity for Rafael. I would often stay late and come in early to work with him. Sometimes we would skip the welding and simply work on developing his goals, maturity, and work ethic to make him successful. I was often impressed with his drive as well as his ability to ask the right questions with complete humility whenever he was having difficulty.

Beyond Rafael's personal journey, I witnessed moments where he motivated and supported his peers with empathy and compassion. Just as Rafael struggled, so did others, and he took his experience to help other students study for exams, practice for weld tests, and generally build up morale. Rafael also volunteered to visit the local high schools with me to promote the welding program and share his journey.

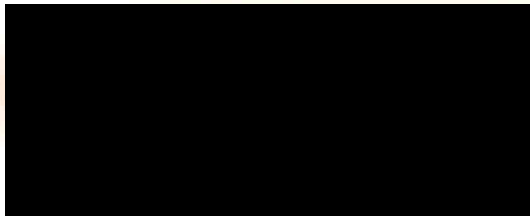
Despite no longer being his welding instructor, I continue to stay in contact with Rafael, and mentor him when he needs it. He has grown so much as a welding professional and more importantly, as an individual over this last year. It is my sincere belief that he possesses great potential to be a productive citizen. As of this writing, Rafael should be graduating in a few short months and I look forward to where he will take his career with his newly acquired skillsets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Graham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph Graham

Shannon Flowers



March 07, 2023

Re: Rafael Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

I have known Rafael for almost 10years, I work for his parents. He is always a welcomed face at the office.

Rafael has always been very courteous and helpful around the office and even worked with us for a while.

He is a very caring and giving person. He always helped his grandmother and even helped me prepare for my driving test by spending driving time with me. Thanks to Rafael I passed my driving test.

While Rafael was away from home he was in a terrible accident and suffered severe injuries. He is still recovering from these injuries today.

Rafael is away in Florida attending welding school and thrives successfully in all his classes. He and I stay in contact with each other throughout his time away from home.

Rafael has continued to be the very caring and positive person I have always known even with the physical and mental challenges he has faced.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shannon Flowers".

Shannon Flowers

[Attachment A]

Dear Judge Scullin,

My name is Eric Gibbs, and I am writing you this letter to provide insight into the integrity, generosity, and character of my good friend Rafael Rondon. I have known Rafael my entire life, as our parents, former neighbors, would put him and I in a play pen together before we could speak or walk. I have had the privilege of growing up beside Rafael, and from pre-school through college we have laughed, cried, failed, succeeded, and learned together. I have seen firsthand his immeasurable kindness, loyalty, tenacity, and resilience that has allowed him to be a source of inspiration and positivity for those around him. I hope that by sharing these experiences you will gain a new perspective on the person he is and will consider them when making your decision.

In May of 2017 Rafael fell 6 stories from a fire escape, landing on concrete and being rushed to the hospital with his life hanging in the balance. When my father told me the news, Rafael was in a medical coma, and the undeniable inevitability of mortality reared its ugly head into my life. We were 20 years old. Stuff like this was a story on the news, a headline with an unfamiliar name that left my brain as quickly as it had entered. Except this time, I knew the name and this story was painfully real. Miraculously Rafael survived his fall. He underwent countless rounds of surgeries, completed hours of grueling therapy, and faced the reality that his life was going to be different from what he had planned. While his friend's continued through college, Rafael had to tear down and rebuild his identity from the ground up. The trauma had changed his appearance and his body couldn't handle the forces he routinely exposed it to when running, snowboarding, and playing tennis. I can't begin to imagine how frustrated, helpless, and afraid Rafael felt during this time. If it had been any other person, I would've been shocked if you told me that they'd make a full recovery, and within a year's time hike the tallest mountain in New York State. That they'd find time through this process to be there for a friend going through a breakup and console them as he consoled himself. Rafael is one of the hardest working and determined people I know, and his recovery from this incident embodies these traits. He refused to succumb to the pain, doubt, and anger he felt and day by day he rehabilitated himself both mentally and physically. Rafael wouldn't accept a life different from the one he envisioned and without complaint, without taking shortcuts, he overcame unsurmountable adversity to make it a

reality. His resiliency was and still is a constant inspiration to me and has pushed me through some of the hardest times of my life.

Rafael is an incredibly loyal and caring individual that treats both his friends and their family as his own. In the winter of 2018, my family and I were away from our home on vacation and Rafael had generously offered to watch the house and feed our pets during the length of our trip. He was at our home when an automated phone call to our land line informed him that my grandmother, who lived in an assistive living facility, had fallen. Without a second thought Rafael drove to her residence to make sure she was safe. After seeing that she was uninjured, Rafael called my family to update us on what had happened before we were even aware of the situation. When his friends or family need him, Rafael is there, no questions asked. Throughout 2022, Rafael's grandmother's health was failing. Her home was a 45-minute drive away, and she was unable to transport herself to doctor's appointments, and refill prescriptions. Rafael filled this role, making the trip to her home multiple times a week to ensure that she received the care she needed. When she felt alone, isolated, and scared, Rafael comforted her. Throughout my life I can't count the number of times that Rafael has adapted to meet the needs of his family and friends. Caregiver, confidant, comedian, coach, and cheerleader are all roles that he has assumed to make others feel safe, supported, and loved. Since starting graduate school in 2020, I have gone through waves of immense stress, imposter syndrome and anxiety. Rafael has made a 90-minute drive on multiple occasions to buy me lunch, take me out for a drink, or accompany me on a hike. He's made me laugh on days that I couldn't smile, believe in myself when my vision was clouded with doubt, consoled me when I've felt alone, and made me have fun when I was taking life too seriously. Both myself and those that know Rafael are immensely grateful and lucky to have a source of such undying support and generosity in our lives.

I could write hundreds of pages about the experiences that Rafael and I have shared over the many years of our friendship, but I believe the instances I've cited above should be sufficient to convince you of his character. Like both you and I, Rafael is human. He has made mistakes, he has regrets, and he has used them as opportunities to grow and better himself. It is the story of Rafael's love, loyalty, resilience, and generosity that pervade the perceptions of those that know him. It is the stories that I have shared with you and others that I will never hear that make him the wonderful person and friend that I know him to be.

Sincerely,

Eric Gibbs

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Gibbs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "E" and "G".

February 27, 2023

RE: Rafael Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin:

I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for Rafael.

I have known Rafael since he was a little boy. I work for Mr. & Mrs. Rondon.

I have always known him to be very courteous and helpful. When his grandmother was ill, he took her to medical appointments, helped her around the gardens and anything else that she might have needed help with.

He is always very polite and pleasant to be around. He worked in our office part-time and was always willing to help out where he could, in addition to his assigned duties.

Several years ago, Rafael suffered very severe injuries in a seven story fall. He has overcome many of the physical difficulties that he encountered.

He is a very mature young man. He is currently attending a trade school for welding and hopes to make this his career. He is very skilled in mathematics and has tutored some of his fellow trade school students.

Debbie McKenzie

[REDACTED]

[Attachment G]

Dear Judge Scullin,

I am Rafael's best and closest friend. Raf is the bravest and strongest person that I have ever met. I can tell you that we have had many memories and experiences together growing up and continuing into our adulthood. I can't count the many times I have been over for the holidays. I've always been invited with the warmest of welcomes. Raf and I have even lived together in NYC. Raf is always the friend to have your back and not leave you when the times get rough. I can recall a memory when my car broke down and barely made it out of the Lincoln Tunnel in NYC. My radiator over heated and we had to get out in the rain and push the car to not block traffic. I can tell you Raf does not give up. When he moved in with me in NYC he immediately started working and making money. I can recall him going to the grocery store almost every day to cut meat. He would tell me stories about how cold his hands would get but he never gave up. Raf and I were also the guys to stay busy and have fun. After work we would get on our longboards and travel all around NYC. We would go through Lower Manhattan, Central Park and even longboarded with traffic in Time Square. He's strong minded and one of the boldest people I have ever met. Not many know, but Raf fell 70 ft and lived. He didn't just live he still walks. He's one of Gods miracles. After many surgeries, he still stands on two feet. I kept watch over Raf one night when he was wrapped in bandages from head to toe. He's so strong he got up and tried walking the second night. I knew after this moment in Raf's life that there would be many obstacles and challenges ahead. Raf has been through many surgeries and within months he was in physical therapy and back on his feet. I remember visiting Raf after New Year's and we were back having a great time, sharing laughs of many memories in our old town. Raf is now working hard to get his welding licenses in Florida. He welcomed me into his home like he always does, and we went to the beach, anchored down our boat for the day and enjoyed a couple drinks. We have had so many great memories and experiences with more to come. The Raf I know does not give up and from what he has been through shows the mountains he's climbed and overcame. I'm beyond proud to say that Rafael is my best friend.

Sincerely,

Patrick Batey

[Attachment E]

3/11/2023

Anthony M Rondon on Behalf of Rafael Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

I am Rafael's uncle and have had the pleasure of knowing Rafael for his entire life and am excited to share some of his highlights as well as his contributions to our family as well as the community that he lives within. He has been a pleasure to be with, helpful, kind, thoughtful and consistent in his efforts and areas of interest. He demonstrates many admirable traits, such as natural leadership, a zest for life, an extreme amount of inner strength and determination to overcome obstacles and lives challenges.

Raphael has been a staple with my children, I have two daughters and two sons throughout the years as we celebrated many Holidays and special family events together. The all of the cousins developed close relationships as they are close in age. He always maintained a positive attitude and offered strong emotional support along with quick wit and a strong sense of family and community. He was always willing to share his knowledge and enjoyed being outdoors and the country life.

Most recently Rafael has been a great cousin and friend to my youngest son Nick and has made a point to be emotionally supportive as well as an inspiration, sharing personal experiences as well as words of love and support. This has been extremely important to both young men as they have both lost their Grandparents this last year (his grandmother Mooney and his grandfather Rondon) as well as the beginning of this year with his grandmother Rondon. All of which played key roles in their lives. More importantly Rafael recognized that he has a strong desire to strengthen his family ties in a positive and often humorous manner always making it a priority.

During a recent trip to Florida with my mother last spring, Rafael made it his mission to spend all his free time with both of us offering to be our tour guide as well as cook and entertain us in general. He has also made himself available to assist with his grandmother's condominiums upkeep as well as getting it prepared for incoming renters. This was while he was attending welding school and offering some of his classmates tutoring at no charge and was grateful to do so.

Rafael also made sure to put all family members first always looking out for his sister, parents and grandparents. He was extremely instrumental in making his Grandmother Mooney one of his top priorities by visiting her often, always offering help around the house, a ride to the store, good companionship and lots of love.

He is very dedicated to family as these examples clearly demonstrate, consistently promoting a strong sense of community, based on love and respect.

Rafael has had many monumental obstacles to overcome, such as his accident just over six years ago when he fell from an apartment building and sustaining many egregious wounds with the potential to be mortal, flat lining not once but twice. Listening to my brother and his wife discuss his treatment, progress and their journey always having one of them always present by his side, despite being over 7 hours away from their home and business. Through this event and his healing and multiple reconstructive surgeries, along with the extreme amount of pain that each new surgery brought. He grew spiritually and mentally aided by extraordinary examples from his parents, learning sacrifice, dedication, determination and unconditional love. It was by a far stretch that this experience would

further shape his love for his family, sense of sheer determination, focus, mental strength, compassion for others and a renewed zest for life.

Rafael has worked for years to heal mentally, physically and spiritually to become the person he is today. To say that he has accomplished many unfathomable things may be an understatement and yet today he offers honesty, clarity, a positive forward direction, dedication and perseverance. He has my utmost respect and love, through his good deeds to others in the family and the community.

He strongly desires to be a productive member of society, and an asset to those that he is close to and serves. I see in Rafael, a strong family member always willing to act quickly and thoughtfully.

It is my most sincere hope that you find value in my words about my nephew and how he as a person, individual, member of his community and family, is an asset and tends to enhance and enrich those lives that he touches. If anyone deserves an opportunity this is the young man that deserves it.

Respectfully,

Anthony Rondon

Anthony Rondon



3.14.2023

Dear Judge Scullin,

Rafael Rondon is a considerate, kind, thoughtful, family loving young man, who has experienced physical trauma that few people would survive.

How do I know so much about Rafael? Our family has known Rafael since about age four. He has been a presence in our life for approximately 22 years. Rafael has been a frequent visitor to our home through the years as he is a best friend of my son Eric.

Through the years, whenever Rafael came over, he would make a point to come and speak to me and my wife Linda. It was always, and continues to be, how are you Mr. Gibbs?, how are you Mrs. Gibbs?. He would take time to talk about the happenings of the day and fill us in on his life. Rafael also spent time talking with my mother who he referred to as "Grandma Gibbs". He cares about family, whether it is his immediate family or his extended family, of which we are a part.

Through the years, Rafael watched our house while we were away. He cared for two cats and a dog and made sure everything was secure. We had no worries while we were gone as we trusted Rafael to take care of things; he always did.

I stated Rafael experienced significant physical trauma in my opening sentence. A few years ago, he fell from the balcony of a high rise in New York City. I believe he fell 5 floors. By all rights he should not have survived. His body was shattered. His friends called my son to get contact information for his parents in order to tell them what had occurred. Rafael spent significant time in a hospital in New York City before being able return to his home in Watertown, New York. He has spent years recovering from the fall. He has pushed himself to regain his strength and resume an active life. In the past couple of year or so, he has hiked a few high peak trails in the Adirondacks with my son, hikes that likely pushed him to the limit.

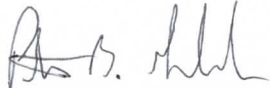
As Rafael healed, he floundered and how could he not flounder? One minute he was a strapping young man and the next he was fighting for his life. He was left facing an uncertain future. He had to see how he would heal to understand what he could do and what he couldn't do. This event put his life on hold. Support from his family, immediate and extended, provided him a shoulder to lean on, gave him hugs when needed and encouragement to hang tough when it seemed hopeless.

Time and hard work allowed him to slowly realize what he is capable of and what those capabilities could translate into relative to identifying a profession. Rafael worked through that nightmare. He gained confidence and found purpose. To that

end, he moved to Florida and enrolled in a welding program, with a goal of becoming an underwater welder.

Rafael is rebuilding his life, as he had to rebuild his body. He is a good man. He is a caring soul who I gladly stand-by and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. B. Gibbs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "G".

Peter B. Gibbs

Reference

Thomas Tuten



Regarding: Rafael C. Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

I am lucky to call Rafael my friend. We have been acquainted for several years, and in that time I have come to respect and admire the courage he has displayed rebuilding his life. After a tragic accident in his late teens, he endured many operations to put his body back together. Managing the constant pain that came with his injuries proved a challenge, but he found a way to cope and move forward with life. I have always found him to be a man of his word, open and honest to a fault. Always on time and considerate of others. Quick to lend a helping hand and do his part. In short, Rafael is a quality individual and I am proud to be his friend. It is in anyone's or any institutions interest to associate with this young man.

Sincerely:

Thomas Tuten

Dear Judge Scullin,

My name is Sydney Gaiolini. I'm writing to you about my best friend and classmate Rafael Rondon. I met Rafael when we both started at Indian River State College, we were in the same welding class about fifteen months ago. When I met him he was very quiet and reserved, but we soon started helping each other with homework and projects. I was one of only three female students in the class and he always treated me with respect and kindness. More importantly, he has always treated me as an equal.

He quickly became my number one supporter, and I became his. He has been there to lend a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on when I needed it most. He would always be the first person to ask me if I needed help or if I was okay. I graduated at the top of the class and as you can imagine not everyone I was in class with was happy about it. Rafael was happy for me though. He was so proud of me, even as he struggled to keep up with me. I wasn't the only one he supported, he did that for everyone in our class. He was always cheering everyone on and encouraging them to keep trying.

There were times when Rafael struggled in class. Instead of letting it discourage him, he put in twice as many hours and reached out for help from me and our teachers. He went in early and stayed late, practicing and practicing until he finally got it! I am so proud to have been able to watch him achieve his goals. Rafael is one of the most genuine and kind people I believe I've come across. I am so lucky to have had him stumble into my life.

As our friendship grew, we started spending time together outside of class. I have a large family (I have six siblings). It started as an invitation to a family dinner and soon became a regular occurrence. He would come over to help us with home renovations before class and on weekends, he participated in family game night, he helped shuttle my sister to dance or just simply to run errands with me. He has just been there for me when I needed someone the most. I hope I have done the same for him. I know I have tried.

In my year and a half of knowing Rafael I've only seen him help the people he cares for and loves. He has always gone out of his way for me and my family. I can't imagine my life without him being a part of it. I wish I could have more time with my best friend.

Sincerely,
Sydney Gaiolini

2/28/2023

Nick Rondon on Behalf of Rafael Rondon

Dear Judge Scullin,

As a very close friend and family member of Rafael Rondon I wanted to write a letter of some things to consider before his upcoming sentencing.

I have known Rafael since a very young age as his is my cousin. Over the past few years Rafael and I have gotten very close and spent a lot more time together. After the passing of Rafael's grandmother and the passing of our grandfather early in 2022, Rafael and I became closer as we worked through the loss of our family members. He and I both decided the best way to make up for lost family was to spend more time together, so we made that happen. I was able to visit Rafael on two separate occasions over the summer while he has been living in Florida. Over those two stays I was able to really see the great friend and family member he really is. Between helping tenants of my grandparent's condominium and working hard to finish welding school, I identified the kind of person Rafael truly is. He values family, cares for others, works hard, and accepts challenges. We went to the gym together, went to the beach, and spent time with his parents as well as his roommates. This was time together that we had both been waiting a long time to get and we really made the most of it. At the beginning of most days while I stayed with him the first thing on his mind was always tending to those staying in the condo and make sure they had all that they needed and were taken care of. He always showed me what his priorities were, and it was obvious that his main objective was to help and care for those around him. I also drove Raf to class on some days as he was not going to miss any chances to further his opportunities in welding.

Rafael has seen a lot of adversity and challenging times at a young age. I believe I was 15 years old when my father got off the phone with my uncle discussing Rafael being in the hospital. He had fallen 5+ stories from a building in Queens, New York. I was beyond relieved after a few weeks/months went by to hear that he was recovering well and eventually being able to walk and drive a car again.

Rafael has also sadly experienced a lot of family deaths in the past year. The most recent being my grandmothers at the end of January. This created some separation in our family, but Rafael could not have been more supportive of everyone and their feelings and decisions towards it all. It hasn't been an easy few years for Rafael or the rest of our family but he is a very strong person and has overcome these tough times.

I'm sure it's easy to see that these things can break someone down and lead them down dark paths but Rafael hasn't let that happen. His adversities have only driven him to do more with his life and pushed him into new opportunities. Rafael suddenly picked up a passion for welding and started making strides to a better, happier, and more positive life. He is one of the most mentally

tough people I have ever met and in a lot of ways he inspires me to be a better person and take on new challenges.

I can confidently say Rafael is the closest member of my family that I have and I'm the youngest of four. He showed me how much he really cares about family and how badly he wants connections with all of us. He reminds me of my grandfather the way he cares for others and wants to promote a close family. My immediate family was not very close when I was growing up so having Raf was essentially like having a brother. He has encouraged me and helped me work through problems too many times for me to count.

Please acknowledge these things when making your final decision. Rafael is on track to a better life, he just needs the opportunity to show you.

Sincerely,

Nick Rondon

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Isabella Rondon

03/06/23

Rafael Christopher Rondon, or Christopher as I call him is my brother. My big brother but more than that one of my greatest friends. Not every sibling pairing can be quite as good as Christopher and I but I'm sure many have attempted. I met my brother on April 5th 2001 and even though neither of us remember it I'm sure it was a pleasure. From my first breath, steps, and words Christopher has been in my life and by my side. I looked up to my brother and wanted to be like him so much when I was younger, from his cool spiky hair, to the cool scooter tricks he could pull off he really inspired me. I am 21 years old now and I still look up to him everyday despite the fact that he no longer spikes his hair or rides a scooter. No, now Christopher is much different and I am too but I have still spent 21 years looking up to him and having the gift of being able to know him.

Despite the circumstances of the last few years for my brother I like to focus on the positive. We are very lucky people and maybe not in everything but we have been blessed with wonderful parents who have always done their best for us and put us above everything. Our family is very important to me and even though I can't read his mind Christopher shows us how much we mean to him. Christopher has always taken me under his wing, and not just me. Even though I'm 3 and ½ years younger than Christopher we always stuck pretty close to each other whether he was willing or not, I would always sneak my way into hanging out with him and his older friends but what are little sisters for. As we became older and he started to accept that he might actually like hanging out with me, my friends also became his friends. I can't tell you how many times and adventures we've had all together. The personal relationships he has made with my closest

friends have meant the world to me over the years. Growing up Christopher would always drive us around and pick us up in our shared 2007 Subaru Forester, which is a very important character in our story as well. The places we would all go together and the fun we had will always be my favorite part of growing up with Christopher as my older brother. He was always willing to accept anyone and could make a conversation out of anything, just one of those people you like to talk to. Christopher is a good friend, better than a good friend. On top of that my brother is one of the smartest people I've ever met! Things I don't understand: he can explain so well and has a solution for just about everything. If I didn't know how to work the new TV box, fix my phone, do a math problem, or had dumb drama Christopher was always there with the truth and a solution. Christopher is also naturally good at quite a few trades, from being a snowboard instructor, to a butcher, and now his latest talent, a welder. Christopher is set to get his certificate this upcoming spring for his welding program. Whenever we talk on the phone he tells me all about his classes and how hard he worked to do well and complete a project. I know this program will be quite good for him and give him a chance to really kickstart a bright and promising future I know he can and will achieve.

At this point you've gotten the picture, I admire my brother very much, honestly more than anyone I've ever met. Throughout the years Christopher has not always had the easiest time and neither has our family, because of these bumps in the road I have grown extremely fond of not just my older brother but my parents as well. Siblings do not always get along 100% of the time and not to mention Christopher and I are basically opposites. It was extremely fun growing up with my older brother. Every day was a new adventure and I always had a friend there to keep life interesting and fun for us. Growing up I had a lot of questions that I didn't understand the

answers too and I was always searching for them. When I said before my brother and I are very opposite I meant it, I am a big feeler and have a lot of emotions I wear on my sleeve while Christopher has always been more practical while I had my head in the clouds. I didn't know much about myself or who I was when I was in my early teens but hanging around Christopher I had a sense of self.

As I end this letter the point I mostly want to get across is yes Christopher can be hard headed and very independent but he is extremely worthy of life and freedom. My family has all given multiple chances to forgive each other and start over everyday and never have I felt like he has ever made me regret a choice like that. He is incredibly strong and I saw that time and time again throughout my life with him. He is a fighter and has continued to fight no matter what is happening. He is always strong and lovable to me. He has so much to offer the world and still so much to learn. Being twenty five is still young in my eyes, and i'm only twenty two, i know nothing about life now and am not sure how much i'll know for sure by the time i'm twenty five, thirty even. Life is a long line of what ifs as i'm sure many of you know and you can't always tell the future. I still have a lot of faith and the world knows it's a happy place. I know that because of the family the world has given me, they've never given up on me, or judge me in any way and I know it's because they know who I truly am and they're the closest to me. Christopher has always had faith in me as I have in him and I don't know what the future holds but I know who my brother is is worth always sticking by. Christopher is my dear friend and a great contribution to my life as well as many others. With all the hope in my heart I hope everyone could get to know my brother just a sliver of how I know him to see him the way we all do.

Dear Judge Scullen,

I hope this letter finds you well.

My darling son, Rafael Christopher was born on October 25, 1997, after an eventful 41-hour labor.

Rafael was Christopher first. As a child we called him Christopher, and then he entered high school and found out that Rafael was much more interesting to the girls. Anyone who knew him before eighth grade, knows him as Christopher, anyone after, Rafael.

As a child, Rafael was a good student and was active in many activities and sports. He especially liked snowboarding and wakeboarding and taught lessons at our local ski area when he was old enough.

Rafael graduated with honors from high school and was accepted into the Pre-Pharmacy program at the University of Buffalo. After three semesters, he found out that this was not the path for him, and he withdrew from UB and moved to NY City and joined his high school friend Patrick Batey.

Rafael had only been living in the city a few months when he took the subway into Manhattan to visit a friend he had met at UB, who lived just off Times Square. On May 17, 2017 Rafael was visiting Luis in Manhattan and they decided to go out on the fire escape so Luis could smoke. As Rafael backed out and turned around on the fire escape, he slipped and fell six and a half stories onto asphalt. Luis rushed down the stairs to try to help Rafael and found a very broken boy at the bottom of the fire escape. Downstairs neighbors heard the thud and commotion and called 911. When Luis got to Rafael, he was semi-conscious, but was drowning in his own blood as his broken teeth had clogged his throat. Luis turned him over and cleared his mouth until the paramedics came. Rafael flat lined twice on his way to the ER at Bellevue. The doctors only decided to try to revive him because he looked fit and would stand a "good chance" of surviving.

Survive he did. At what price we are still trying to decide. We received a phone call from Luis on the night of the accident and he "bright sided" Rafael's injuries but was adamant that one of us should get there ASAP. He said Rafael had a broken arm and some other injuries and was in surgery. Rafael's dad, Chris, left almost immediately, and I stayed home with our then 14-year-old daughter, Isabella.

Around 4am I received a call from the surgeons that had operated on Rafael and they explained all of Rafael's injuries; removed spleen, compound fractures to both elbows, fractured hip, kneecap shattered, ribs, fingers, jaw shattered, etc. How could I call Chris and tell him the gravity of the injuries when he was about to drive into Manhattan, and had no idea where or what he was driving into?

Over the course of the next six weeks Rafael endured surgery after surgery in an attempt to put his body back together. He was in the critical care unit for five weeks at Bellevue. He then went to a surgical unit for two more weeks and then was discharged to an acute rehabilitation center in Yonkers for another three weeks. During this time, he was transported via medical transportation for follow up appointments in Manhattan. The acute rehabilitation center was necessary because when Rafael was released from Bellevue, he was none weight bearing on all four limbs. As I stated earlier, he had shattered his right knee cap and now had seven screws holding it together, he had broken his left hip and both elbows had been shattered. He was also on a liquid diet as he had lost or broken all his teeth and 22 tiny plates held his shattered jaw together. Chris and I spent those weeks tag teaming our time between Bellevue, Yonkers and home.

Chris and I brought Rafael home from Yonkers and within a day I had to take him to the Upstate ER because one of his elbows had gotten infected under the mesh that held it together and had broken open. The doctors insisted he be admitted and I remember he cried because we had just gotten him home, and now he was back in a hospital bed.

Rafael's recovery would not be quick or easy. We found doctors in Syracuse that could continue the work he would need on his orthopedic injuries and Dr. Ercoli in Rochester that would work on restoring his jaw and teeth. Several pieces of the metal mesh that were originally placed, needed to be removed as some of those sights continued to become infected. Because Rafael's jaw had been shattered so badly, Dr. Ercoli needed to do bone grafts from his hip to reinforce his lower jaw. This was very painful and took many months to heal. Dr. Ercoli addressed his jaws in four parts, upper left, upper right, lower right, lower left over the next two years first with the bone grafts and then with implant posts.

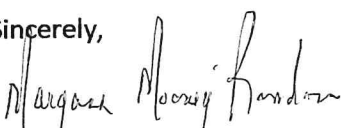
During this time Rafael suffered from depression as he had so many injuries and was so weak and defeated. All his friends were at school or working and he was stuck at home on a slow and painful recovery path. When he was well enough, he did take some on-line classes but refused to take any in person as he felt everyone stared at his face and scars. Slowly, he accepted his situation and became more like himself but will probably always feel he was dealt a terrible deal and wear a beard to hide the scarring.

While recovering we discussed his future and at first he didn't see one but somehow, as he continued to heal, he expressed that he had become interested in pursuing welding. It certainly was a big change in career paths, but we were very supportive of him moving forward and finding something that would provide a great living for him. When we did an internet search and looked for top welding schools, we found one of the best was in Fort Pierce, Florida which is where our family owns a condo and we already had friends living there. The program at Indian River State College was very competitive to get a slot but fortunately, Rafael was accepted.

Rafael moved to Fort Pierce and began his program in March 2022 and is on track to graduate with his certification in May 2023. There are many welding opportunities in Florida, and he is confident he will secure a job as soon as possible after graduation.

We are very proud of Rafael for many reasons. He is kind and has a heart of gold. We have always been a close little family, but because of all the time we spent together during his recovery, we have become even tighter. He and my mother shared an especially close relationship and during his recovery, after he was able, he would help her with her yardwork and gardening to help her stay in her home. He also drove her to the cancer treatment center in Ogdensburg to have blood transfusions and was very sweet, patient and gentle. Rafael has every reason to sit around and feel sorry for himself as he has so many orthopedic injuries and is in pain every day, all day, but he has chosen to move on and become a very productive man. We are looking forward to him starting his first welding job and finally having a normal life and future.

Sincerely,



Maryann Rondon