

October 1, 2015

Hon. J.R. Smith, Presiding Judge
100 S. Main Ave
Any town, SD 00000

Dear Judge Smith,

I am writing in regards to Bill Johnson and his MTR hearing. Bill reached out to me about writing a letter of support and deciding what to say has been a struggle.

Over the past decade, I have watched the devastating effects of addiction and mental illness impact his life, as well as the lives of those who care about him. Unfortunately, the list of the latter has grown shorter. I was very optimistic that the prior possession conviction was the point at which he would make a change. It was the first time I saw Bill having optimism about his future and was hopeful that he would be a success story of the subsequent probation program.

Developmentally, Bill's decision-making skills are adolescent—it feels like he does not grasp the severity of this situation. His lack of self-confidence and humility also demonstrate his stunted development. While he does not appear to take these proceedings seriously, this may be a reflection of the developmental deficit brought about by his addiction and frankly, plain old fear. Nearly all of his old peer group has moved on to life milestones like professional careers or meaningful employment, home ownership, stable relationships or marriage, and starting families. Whether or not Bill wants those milestones is not important to my point, my point is that he has reached an impasse where his sickness and subsequent actions have further isolated him from his peers. Find new friends, right? Except those “friends” have been a line of manipulators, people in active addiction, and individuals exhibiting criminal thinking and behaviors.

He is stuck. And he is the only one who can learn to manage his diseases to make meaningful change in his life. Proper medication, structure, and accountability measures are all critical to him getting well. Bill is a kind and talented person. He has access to resources that many do not. I am certain prison would change Bill; I am uncertain whether the change would be positive.

The easy route is to label Bill non-compliant or simply expect that it is time for him to grow up. A better route is to surround him with services and find clinicians and peer support persons who will work with Bill and help motivate him to change his life. Perhaps a more intensive probation program would benefit Bill, with extra conditions including regular psychiatric appointments, weekly recovery coaching sessions, group meetings, and part-time employment.

Thank you for your time and considering my thoughts. If I can provide any further assistance or information, please contact me at (605) 555-5555.

Best,

Julie Schoolmeester