

The Federal Correctional Institution, Elkton  
8730 Scroggs Rd, Lisbon, OH 44432  
(330) 420-6200

The Hon. Naomi Reice Buchwald  
United States District Court  
Southern District of New York  
500 Pearl Street  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Buchwald,

The attached motion attempts to outline the current situation and risks that lead to me ask to serve the remainder of my sentence on home detention. However, I believe I need to write you a letter outlining the person behind the motion you're considering, who I've come to be, and how the justice system has changed my life. Regardless of your consideration, I hope you can get a glimpse into my mind, and see the role the justice system has played on my life, and hopefully, in some small way, society, and the world around me.

When I was arrested, my family and friends couldn't understand my actions. Their demand for answers only got worse as I violated bail, was sentenced, and finally had a USB device in Otisville. Their questions focused on the following themes:

"When will you learn?"  
"Do you understand why you did what you did?"  
"How will you change?"

If the people who love and know me best were asking these questions, I can only imagine what everyone else is asking. It's time to provide answers.

1) When will you learn?

When I was on bail, I didn't even realize I had to learn. I was trying to hang on to the life I thought I had. I didn't understand. I was mentally fighting back, thinking that while I was totally wrong in my actions, my intentions were good. I was thinking I just wanted to make everyone happy and make things work at all costs.

This thinking couldn't have been more wrong. I had to let go. I had to reset. I had to completely change.

It took me violating bail, being in prison for a year, and finally getting sent to the SHU before I realized where I went wrong. I needed to reflect on why I did what I did. I needed to stop mentally fighting what my family and friends were telling me. I needed to address the gaping hole in my rationalization and thought process that the words you used to describe me during sentencing made glaringly appearant. I needed to understand why I did what I did. And most importantly, I needed to reset, to learn where I went wrong, know why I went wrong, and set a plan, and begin taking the steps to change myself.

2) Do you understand why you did what you did?

I didn't recognize the man you described at sentencing. When I heard 6 years, it felt like I was handed a life sentence. My mind immediately turned to thoughts of showing everyone I wasn't this horrible person. In this pursuit, I didn't realize what I needed had nothing to do with showing others. What I needed to do - what I truly believe you were trying to tell me - was that in order to go as horribly wrong as I did, something was off. Something went so completely wrong with my morality, that it couldn't be described or pushed aside by anything else. You were telling me the acts of bad so far outweighed any good, that there's only one choice, and that was to completely change my approach to life.

The lengthy sentence should've woken me to this reality.

I'm embarrassed to say that this wasn't yet rock bottom. In my attempt to prove that I wasn't this person, I was dead set on writing a book and giving all of the proceeds to recovery. I had a USB device to try and once again go too fast. This lead me to go to the SHU in July of 2019. Prior to going to the SHU, I'd been dead set on not doing anything illegal, but I was still determined to show, through positive results, at all costs. Looking back, it's unbelievable that I didn't yet realize this "at all costs" mentality was poison. I still had this mindset, and still hadn't realized what you were trying to tell me. I had so much to learn before I could do something right.

Fortunately, the SHU woke me up. It helped me see the truth. It was singlehandedly the best thing to happen to me.

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The understanding of why I went wrong all started with the realization that the true punishment of jail isn't anything like I expected it would be. The SHU taught me that the true punishment of jail is the cries and pleas for help from the ones I love. It's the tears, the pain, the suffering, and the begging to just "PLEASE DO SOMETHING" from my loved ones, and the complete inability to help. It's being separated from these loved ones in a cage for 3 months, when the one phone call we're allowed per month cuts off just as the person on the other end is pleading for help. The true punishment is not going to jail ourselves, but that we impart our sentence on the innocent ones we love.

I thought I'd learned I didn't belong here in my 7 months in Brooklyn. I thought seeing people get stabbed, threatened, raped, and even commit suicide, would be enough. I thought that when someone came into my cell with a knife, and said, "only one of us leaves alive," I'd realize how horribly wrong I went. This all may have scarred me straight -- it's a running joke amongst my dormmates that I annoyingly say, "be careful. don't do anything illegal" -- but it didn't show me the desperate need to completely change my approach. I'm further embarrassed to admit that this wasn't enough, that it took going to solitary confinement to see the full picture of pain that I spread on others. However, I'm proud that during my time in solitary, I was able to realize that I needed to reset. I promised myself that I'd make this the best thing to ever happen to me, the ones I love, and the ones I hurt and let down.

3) How will you change?

After 22 months in jail, and 9 months after going to the SHU, I'm making good on my promise to myself. I've come to learn the patience required for my intentions to come to fruition. I've also come to see that the first step is being true to myself, and making good on my personal promises, goals, and intentions. The reflections in the SHU can be summed up in one statement: I lost my purpose and mission. In order to reset, I needed a clear mission; a goal for every single day. Something I could begin living and executing from within the confines of the SHU.

I adopted a personal mission and purpose of dedicating my life to helping everyone I let down and those around me, being there for my family, and making sure all of my actions, in furtherance of my purpose, are done transparently and within the allowed boundaries. This was easy to start with in the SHU. There were a number of men that I can only describe as desperate and forgotten. The smallest of actions could make their day. I started waking up with one goal - before I can help those I let down, and before I can be there for my family, I needed to spend each day helping one person in my environment. In the three months I spent in the SHU, I know I made a positive impact - from the inmates to the guards and staff, I think I made everyone's time a little bit better.

In October, I was transferred to Elkton. The ultimate punishment of distance from family and loved ones was exacerbated, but I've continued my purpose: following my mission of helping those I let down, while doing good for the environment around me. In addition to what I'm working on for those I hurt, I saw the devastation that Coronavirus is having on inmates and their innocent families. As I learned in the SHU, the ultimate punishment is on our families - taking us away from them when they need us most. Specifically, many families have been hurt economically by the virus, and haven't been able to send their incarcerated loved ones the money needed to stay in touch via the prison phone. With help from my friends at home, I launched a small initiative, called Project-315, to help connect these in-need families, by funding a prison pay-phone call. We funded every single family/inmate who applied, and a week later, the BOP made phone calls free for all inmates during this emergency. This was a very small step, but I believe it's necessary for my growth and the overall good that I've been focusing on providing everyone I let down.

The motion outlines the seriousness of the situation at FCI Elkton, the health risks that I'm exposed to by being here, and how I can contribute positively via home detention. However, regardless of your consideration of the motion, I'd like you to know the impact this situation has had on me. My thoughts immediately after sentencing couldn't have been further from reality. It took me longer than it should've, but your message has come through. It'll be a long road, but I can finally report, everything feels right. I'm living with a level of peace and acceptance that I lost in the events leading up to my arrest. I'm working harder than ever, in furtherance of a mission I truly know is right. I know that by living every day with the dedication of helping those I let down, and by doing it within the rules and regulations, I will slowly but surely continue down the path so I badly needed to regain.

Sincerely,  
Billy McFarland

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