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U.S. District Court- Southern District of Georgia
Honorable Judge J. Randal Hall
PO BOX 1130
Augusta GA 30903

Dear Honorable Judge J. Randal Hall,

I am writing this character letter in support of Brandon Thurmond, whom I have known for 8 years and whom I have been in a romantic relationship with the last 2 years. I am aware that Brandon is currently facing charges in federal court, and I am compelled to share my perspective on his character and personal circumstances.

Throughout my acquaintance with Brandon, I have witnessed his genuine remorse for the actions that have led to these charges. He has expressed deep regret and anxiety about the situation, demonstrating a sense of responsibility and a desire to make amends. Despite the challenges he is facing, Brandon has shown resilience and a willingness to confront the consequences of his actions.

I am aware of certain personal circumstances in Brandon's life that may have contributed to the offense he is charged with. Up until 2016, Brandon has always been law-abiding and overcame a lot of his challenges he faced as a child. He was raised by a single mother of 4 with no father-figure during his adolescence, so the thought that he "needed" to provide for his mother and sisters has always been a mentality. For as long as I have known Brandon, before and during prison, Brandon aspires to be a present father as well as a man who provides not only emotionally and spiritually- but also financially. While he was serving 5 years of a 15 year sentence with the state of Georgia, he made a desperate and stupid decision 3 years ago that he was completely oblivious to the consequences as he was desperate to provide for family, especially his daughter, while he was in custody. Brandon has faced many tragic events in his life, but the most tragic is becoming a first time offender, being incarcerated 5 years and that alone has had a profound impact on his mental and emotional well-being.

Brandon is a compassionate and caring person who has always prioritized the well-being of his family and loved ones. Despite the challenges he has encountered, Brandon has remained a source of support and stability for his family, specifically his daughter Laila, my daughter Dakota and myself.

Since being released on parole with the State of Georgia in September, the very first person he wanted to surprise was his daughter Laila. I have witnessed how present he was before he was incarcerated and how present he was to the best of his ability while he was in prison. From the moment he surprised her the day he was released, the relationship between the two of them have flourished tremendously. As his partner, I have supported the relationship of his daughter to continue to grow as he missed so many pivotal moments in her life and we all know he

cannot get that time back but every single day he is present counts. We have spent a lot of time together as a blended family and I love that I have also been able to witness Brandon and Laila's relationship first hand because if you did not know that Brandon went to prison, you would think he has not missed a beat. I can speak for Laila and say that Brandon encourages her to be a respectful young lady, he is her number 1 fan in any new ventures she takes on in life and actively listens to all of the emotions she has went through while he was away. Brandon and Laila have been making up for the time he missed and cant help but to show remorse as he is witnessing the decisions that he made affected the person who depends on him most, Laila.

Brandon takes pride in being a present father as he experienced not having one during his childhood, so no matter the obstacle, when it comes to his children, he is going to fight and overcome. Brandon has put his faith in the justice system and opened a legitimation case so that he can have custodial and parenting rights legally in the state of Georgia as the mother of his child began to make it very difficult for his relationship with his daughter to grow. He has been fighting the legitimation case since November 17th 2023 and after numerous court dates and my support with hiring an attorney, he has the date set in place of May 17th 2024 with the Juvenile Courts of Dekalb County, to finally legally have rights to his daughter. It was also brought to his attention in February 2024 because Laila made an outcry that she has been mentally, emotionally and physically abused during the time he was away in prison and since he has been home. DFCS opened a case against the mother of his child and agreed that Laila was best off in the custody of her father fulltime but since the legitimation process was not complete yet, he is left with no choice but to remain patient, have faith in God to protect his daughter and wait for the upcoming date. This unforeseen situation has taken a toll on Brandon's anxiety when it comes to not only worrying about the well-being of his daughter but how much damage it will do to her if he is not physically present to protect, provide and raise her. Brandon has spoken to me countless times on how remorseful he is for the selfish decisions he made as the impact and possible outcomes are detrimental to more than just him but to the people he loves.

His dedication to his biological daughter shows unwavering commitment and that trait is something that my daughter, Dakota, has also been able to experience firsthand. Dakota is 12 years old, and her father has been an inconsistent parent in her life. Brandon stepped up as a positive male role model in her life well before he was released. He genuinely and consistently offered his advice and help with homework which were signs that he wanted to be present even while in prison. Since the day he has been released, Brandon and Dakota have been inseparable. Brandon has naturally became the father-figure and extended support that my baby has been missing. He is very involved with her day to day life from taking her to school, showing up to her cheerleading events, sports games to having dinner and spending quality time every evening. I have witnessed the positive impact that Brandon's presence in the household has made on my daughter. He is a great father and I cannot imagine the pain and confusion it will cause both of the girls, if he has to physically leave them. Brandon is prepared to hold his head up high and get through whatever is to come and I admire that about him but it is challenging for me to prepare our daughter's for the worst case scenario.

Witnessing Brandon as a father to both Laila and Dakota, I was extremely excited to extend our family and we were expecting a child to be born August 2024. I suffered a mis-miscarriage in February which caused me to be hospitalized for a few days the week of Brandon's birthday. There were days Brandon said he felt helpless because there was nothing that he could do to take the pain I was enduring away physically or emotionally, but his presence was more than enough. Brandon was the support I needed as I did not take it well and it is something I am still healing from today. I was diagnosed with post-partum depression and some days are better than others. The days that I do not feel like getting out of bed, Brandon is here to show up for my daughter and carry on the parenting duties that I am emotionally unable to show up for. He

constantly provides me with encouragement and hope for us to try again and reminds me that everything will okay. Although Brandon displays strength and positiveness, I know that losing a child after he was excited to grow our family as well has taken an emotional toll on him. On top of the custody situation with his daughter and knowing a sentencing is coming up- I have no idea how Brandon stays positive, motivated and supportive for not only himself personally but also everyone around him.

Brandon has expressed to me that every single part of his life, the good and the bad, is a part of his testimony so he makes sure not to leave anything out. When he came home from prison, I witnessed Brandon stay up until 3:00am submitting his resume to hundreds of jobs and preparing for interviews before they even reached back out to him. His determination to set the tone for his future by obtaining employment was unmatched. Brandon had many interviews and on several occasions returned home encouraged and excited because he was organically himself and left no details out while interviewing. The same way he mentioned his Bachelors Degree, his NFL and CFL Career and positive traits, he also mentioned that he was a felon and just came home from prison. I was taken back by the integrity and humbleness that Brandon showed during this process but was even more happy to see that there were several people who offered Brandon a second chance and extended offers within the first 2 weeks of returning from prison. His story is inspiring and is bigger than the hurdles placed in front of him due to his poor decisions that he made. I have never heard Brandon complain about his challenges as a felon, about his probation/parole restrictions nor blame anyone other than himself for the position he is in.

Additionally, Brandon has partnered with Village Strong Nonprofit Co., which is a Nonprofit I started 3 years ago that provides support and resources to at-risk youth and families. He has used his free time to show up for teenage boys who do not have a father figure present by making it to their games, training, mentoring and guiding them through trials they face. His dedication and selflessness have made a positive impact on the community. Brandon is hosting free youth football camps for kids to come and use football as an outlet. While these kids are learning new drills on the football field, they are also learning the value of making good decisions, leadership skills and being supported so that they can thrive. The teenagers that Brandon helps are at-risk because many of them have lost their fathers to violence or prison and lack a positive role model that they can relate to. Brandon shares his story and gives them hope that they can work hard and achieve anything they put their minds too and it motivates them to make better decisions because they have Brandon rooting for them.

If Brandon were to have to fulfill his sentence away, it would have devastating effects on not only him and his family but a community of kids who are depending on Brandon to show up. The emotional burden that a separation would impose on his loved ones is a matter of great concern. Brandon plays a vital role in providing support and stability and his absence would leave a significant void that cannot easily be filled.

I believe that Brandon is a person of integrity who has shown remorse for his actions and is committed to taking responsibility for his actions. Your Honor, I respectfully ask that you please consider home confinement as option for Brandon to fulfill his sentence. Please take Brandon's dedication to making the right decisions, abiding by his current parole and probation stipulations, the impact he has made on so many others since being released, his personal circumstances and the challenges he has faced into consideration when determining his sentence.

Thank you, Your Honor, for taking the time to read this entire letter as I value your time and consideration. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you, again.

Best Regards,

Brandi Barkus