

Dear Judge Kaplan,

My name is Cynthia Lewis. I'm Chanette Lewis's older sister. I'm a 34 year old student in Medical Health Care. I currently live in Brooklyn, New York. I come from a large family with mental health and drug problems, which our parents both struggled with, including our father who recently passed away.

If anyone knows my sister and the trauma she grew up with, it's me. We lived in the same home as kids with my mother, Cynthia Lewis Sr., and my stepfather Bertram Clark. My mother was diagnosed with bipolar and schizophrenia and wasn't taking medication when my sister and I were kids. Many of her symptoms and instability were geared at my sister. My stepfather was a hardworking gentleman that passed away. He was diagnosed with HIV, but when my sister was 14 years old he passed from cancer.

Once my stepfather passed away, my sister began to skip school and her behavior started becoming manic. My mother then brought us to her doctor's appointment to speak with a social worker. The social worker sat me and my sister down and explained that our mother also has HIV. From then on, I think my sister couldn't mentally handle it. My mother started getting sick with health and mental health problems, so I moved out. Chanette was alone with my mother. I kept checking on my family, but I began working as a prostitute to feed my mother and my sister because I felt it was my responsibility. A year after, I also was diagnosed with HIV. I felt like everyone around my sister was getting sick and I noticed she became more aggressive and depressed.

As my sister got older, we signed her up for a therapist and she was diagnosed with PTSD and bipolar II. She was on and off with her medication. She also became pregnant at the age of 18 and had my nephew, Kareem Brown. His father got incarcerated and Chanette became a struggling single mother. I watched my sister also go into prostitution to feed her child and my mother. We tried everything to make her quit but she always said "you and mommy are sick, I have to survive and be the rock for my family." From then on, we put her in every program, therapy, peer support group we could imagine but within a couple of years my sister got incarcerated and did two years in jail.

When she returned from jail, my sister kind of felt like a new person. I noticed the hurt she felt from being away from her son. She took her medication daily, enrolled in school, got a job, and began to take her job more seriously. She got married and had 2 more kids. Then, her husband passed away from covid and underlying health issues on January 30, 2022. She tried her best to hide her pain from us and her kids. But throughout her life, I've witnessed Chanette lose people and never grieve properly. My sister is back to being a widow, single mother, and the rock of the family. My mother and I both have HIV and my mother has other health issues, so Chanette bears most of it.

Your Honor, please give Chanette another chance. No one knows her better than me. She needs therapy to cope with the death of her husband and father. I know she's learned from her mistake. She's expressed to me that she's scared to disappoint her oldest child, Kareem, and is scared for her two kids to experience being away from her. Her kids main support is their mother. She's

shown me that she's changed by going to her job every day, going to therapy every week, taking her medication daily, and by giving advice to others by telling them not to make the same mistakes she did.

Please be kind with her sentence. Being incarcerated would not help her, it would just add more pain and separate her from her kids who need her. If you have any further questions regarding my sister, you can contact me at (929) 969-5441.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Lewis
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