

January 6, 2004

Honorable William J. Haynes, Jr.  
Judge, United States District Court  
649 United States Courthouse  
Nashville, TN 37203

Re: Bernard H. Ellis, Jr., MS, MPH

Dear Judge Haynes, Jr.,

I am writing to you as a United Methodist clergyperson appointed by the Tennessee Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to my current position as the director of public policy and community organizing of Religious Leaders, a national interfaith coalition. We are deeply concerned about the impact of current drug policy and work for a more just and compassionate policy – one which incorporates a restorative justice, harm reduction, and public health approach to drug policy. While I know you are not in a position to directly change drug policy or legislation, you will be called upon to make some decisions in how those policies are applied in the case of Bernie Ellis.

As someone who has lived in Middle Tennessee since 1968, I am aware of your work and your willingness to listen, your record of concern for justice and fairness and your wisdom in sifting through details to uncover truth. I am grateful for the opportunity to write to you and thank you ahead of time for reading this letter.

I met Bernie Ellis a little over a year ago during a national conference on theology and drug policy, convened here in Nashville by our organization in partnership with Vanderbilt Divinity School, Meharry's Lloyd Elam Community Mental Health Center and American Baptist College. While I was already aware of some of his work in substance abuse prevention and treatment among Native American communities and his documented effectiveness in the areas of creating, administering and evaluating substance abuse treatment programs, I had not met him personally and knew nothing

about the charges against him. However, during the conference I became aware of some of the details of his case and shared them with a number of conference participants. Everyone – from those in the federal and state criminal justice systems, to clergypersons, rabbis and theology professors – was alarmed at the contradictions in this case – and the potential waste of human resources and life if Bernie is sent to prison.

It seems ironic that we would lock up someone who is probably one of the top people in this country in organizing communities to effectively prevent and treat substance abuse – especially in communities that are hardest hit, such as the Native American communities in which he has worked. Bernie’s compassion and creativity, generosity and gentleness, intelligence and effectiveness are clearly documented and time after time have been invested in communities who otherwise had no access to the urgently needed resources he brings.

As someone who has a brother with nineteen years of recovery from substance abuse, as a pastor who has worked in Middle Tennessee for fifteen years among urban and rural communities devastated by the drug war and the consequences of substance abuse, and as a community activist who has worked for almost thirty years in the areas of community organizing and development, I know Bernie Ellis is an invaluable community asset, bearing gifts that are urgently needed.

I know you will receive detailed information about Bernie’s work and credentials so I will not add those here. I also know you have a most difficult job in this matter. I am confident that you will find a way to bring about the greatest good for everyone. I continue to be thankful for your work and witness.

Sincerely,

Rev. Janet L. Wolf