

You've been arrested. Character letters to the Judge – do they help?

Yes, if written correctly.

Prior to your sentencing, it is possible to have friends, relatives, co-workers and employers write character letters of support to the judge, which you hope will be considered prior to the judge imposing a sentence. The Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure have limited the amount of leeway a judge has due to mandated sentencing guidelines; however, the judge does have some discretion, and at times strong letters of support can influence a judge to impose a sentence at the lower end of the range set forth in the guidelines. Here's what to do:

1. **Make a list of 2-3 people you respect** who you believe will go to bat for you and ask them if they would consider speaking up on your behalf. Be completely honest about your situation.
2. **The letter should be written on letterhead** wherever possible.
3. **Use the official address and salutation:** The Honorable Judge EilaTurner-Loose, West Pasco Government Center, 7530 Little Rd., Rm 200, New Port Richey, FL 34654.
Dear Honorable Judge Turner-Loose:
4. **Highlight the relationship between the letter's author and the accused** in the most favorable light: My name is Deserva Break, M.D. I am a practicing physician and Chief of Staff at We Care Medical Center. Ms. Thefty has worked for me for 8 years etc. She is adored by patients and co-workers because of her patience, kindness etc.
5. **The writer should let the judge know the defendant has been candid** about her legal problems and explain why these particularly circumstances are so uncharacteristic. Give examples of positive character traits. Be concise and concrete. Specifics rather than generalizations carry more weight. Include stories of good deeds and positive contributions to the community.
6. **Let the judge know the remorse felt by the defendant** and the commitment never to repeat the unfortunate circumstances. Explain why incarceration would not be beneficial to the community and the contributions the defendant will continue to make if allowed her liberty. Describe the ways people rely on the defendant and those innocents who will suffer if the defendant is behind bars. It is OK to include financial hardships.
7. **Make no disparaging remarks about anyone.** Do not character assassinate alleged victims or co-defendants. Do not make excuses. Focus instead on signs of improvement you've observed since the arrest. Speak only of the positive light in which you see the defendant, the ways in which you need her and the hardships others, particularly children, will suffer if she is behind bars.
8. **Thank the Judge in advance for taking the time to read and consider** your remarks and acknowledge that Judge Turner-Loose has the power to affect Ms. Thefty's future and how grateful you all will be if the judge is lenient in sentencing.