

Dear Governor Philip Murphy ,

I respectfully write to strongly urge you to release Sundiata Acoli from prison. I am an activist and community leader in New York City. I am founder and Executive Director of Dream Deferred Inc. a non-profit based in Brooklyn, NY. The mission of Dream Deferred, Inc. is to increase public safety through innovative services that reduce crime and incarceration, improve behavioral health, promote technology, education & employment, and create opportunities for success in the community. Prior to founding Dream Deferred Inc. I was the Executive Director of Guns Down Inc. whose mission was promoting anti-violence through education and conflict resolution training. I have been employed as a paralegal at a New York City law firm for the past 2 ½ years.

Governor Murphy, what might perhaps be of most interest to you is that on December 22, 2016 I was released from federal prison due to a commutation granted to me by President Barack H. Obama.

Prior to my commutation I served fifteen years of a life sentence; part of that time I served at Otisville Federal Correctional Institution and that is where I met Sundiata.

It's fair to say that Sundiata had a major impact on me and helped me to become a contributing member of society.

My first impression of Sundiata was that he had a gentle disposition, polite and poised; despite having already served 35+ years. His positive outlook astonished me. That first day we spoke for almost an hour mostly about my life sentence, my journey and my plan for how I would handle my incarceration. He was empathetic and encouraging. Our friendship grew into what I now describe as mentorship, even fatherly relationship. We continued our talks which included discussions about our community, the breakdown of the family unit, the toll drugs and violence has taken on the black community; we talked about our futures, our daughters and our absence in their lives and what that meant for our families. I can confidently say that these conversations resulted in meaningful introspection that impelled us both to serve our time with dignity and as model inmates.

Through his mentorship I learned how to be a better man, how to want to be better for my community and my duty to my fellow inmates-helping others on the inside which translates into making them productive, law-abiding citizens on the outside.

When asked what characteristics and/or qualities I admire in Sundiata; I without hesitation always respond - his warm smile, pleasant and respectful demeanor to staff and inmates alike. I speak of a man who regardless of his circumstances, remain positive and is able to encourage behavioral growth in inmates young and old. Under his mentorship and influence; I and others have gained insight into our past criminal behaviors. I see a great man, an inspirational man, a man dedicating his time to teaching younger men accountability and responsibility.

My prayer is that Sundiata be allowed to go home to his family. I know first- hand what it means to go home to my family after serving a considerable amount of time. I remember at that time he was in his 70's just like my father and its sobering to me that he is now 83 years old and still

incarcerated. I recently lost my dad who would have celebrated his 83rd birthday this coming October. It breaks my heart to think that Sundiata could spend his final years in prison.

Short term, his release can soothe much of the hurt our community is currently experiencing by promoting non-violent social change. Long term; his release would have a beneficial impact on society; particularly among young men.

As friend and as part of the work that my organization does with formerly incarcerated men and women I pledge to do everything I can to support Sundiata's re-entry into society, and answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Frantz Michel
Founder and Executive Director
Dream Deferred
(contact information)