6. Sample Character Reference Letter: Neighbor

Date

The Honorable (name of your judge)

United States District Court Judge

(Name of your judicial district)

(Address of your judicial district)

City of your judicial district, state, zip

Regarding: U.S.—v—Your name and case number

Dear Judge (last name):

My name is [insert name] and XX has been my neighbor for about 15 years. I’ve come to consider him as a polite, helpful friend and I am thankful to live next door to him.

I was very sorry to hear XX tell me about his criminal misconduct. During all of the years that I have known him, I’ve considered him a good citizen. He characteristically accepted full responsibility for his wrongdoing and was clear about his need to make amends. Something went terribly wrong that caused XX to deviate from the good character I’ve always seen in him.

Nevertheless, I am happy for this opportunity to serve as a character reference during his sentencing process.

When I first met XX, it was 1:00 pm. and the sun was shining bright. Locked out of his house, my new neighbor was knocking on my door to ask for help. He was sweet, warm, and embarrassed. I could not ask for a friendlier neighbor. Knowing that I’m disabled, during the winter, he plows my driveway when it snows without my even having to ask. During the summer, he’ll stop by and chat. For XX, being a neighbor is not transactional. He helps automatically and asks for nothing in return.

XX’s family and I are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I am the bishop of our ward. As a ward member, XX’s family is always responsive to calls for service. He volunteers to feed missionaries and assists members during extreme weather. Once, XX came to us during a time of personal stress. He bravely disclosed private details that most men would keep to themselves. I greatly admired XX’s courage and deep sense of duty. His honesty inspired all of us.

I have also been an airplane passenger when XX was the pilot. I have flown with many pilots over the years. XX is certainly the most responsible, conscientious pilot I’ve seen. He adheres to his checklists and takes all safety precautions. I trusted him in the air with my daughter-in-law and her family. I would never hesitate to fly with XX. He is a steady, good man who truly cares for his fellow human beings.

Given what I saw of his thorough caution as a pilot, I was surprised to hear him describe how he violated the rules at the XXXXX. Following that news, I was not surprised to hear that he took full responsibility. There is no shame in repentance. I respect XX for holding himself accountable. Again, he is serving as a great example of how to handle mistakes and do the right thing.

XX’s children are also my neighbors. They are polite, hard-working kids who are a tribute to their loving parents. I am sorry to know that XX and his family will go through challenges ahead. He knows he made a serious mistake and has learned his lesson about following the rules at all times. I trust that this court will do the right thing and temper justice with mercy.

Your Honor, please consider these thoughts as you deliberate over the appropriate punishment for my dear neighbor, XX.

Sincerely,

[Neighbor’s name]