

January 18, 2004

Judge William J. Haynes, Jr.
U.S. District Judge
649 U.S. Courthouse
Nashville, TN 37203

Honorable Judge Haynes,

I have had the opportunity to work with Bernie Ellis during the years he served the Wind River Reservation and the State of Wyoming in developing a comprehensive, state funded Substance Abuse Program. Bernie was single-handedly responsible for the development of an alcohol detox center (the Fremont County Alcohol Crisis Center) and adult and juvenile Drug Courts in Fremont County and on the Wind River Reservation.

Justice is not being served by the action being pursued by the legal system in Mr. Ellis's case and, rather, displays for me the irrational approach of the criminalizing system (not criminal justice system). Incarceration and forfeiture of property are far too harsh and unreasonable.

I am an ex-College Counselor and Wyoming State Legislator who has been in recovery for many years. I am not a user of drugs and alcohol. Rather I've dedicated my life, as Bernie has, to reducing the harmful impact of drug and alcohol abuse in my community and among my people. As a Native American, I see daily the devastation caused by problematic and chronic chemical dependency. Bernie, fortunately for me and my community, has chosen for eight years to aid our efforts and we have benefited from his expertise and enthusiasm for our efforts. Bernie has personally footed the cost of researching and publishing the results of social indicators' studies that Fremont County and Wind River Country leaders have used to influence the Wyoming Legislature in supporting our substance abuse programs. He has done this because he knows that this area is one of the poorest counties in the United States and his compassion for my people is strong and unwavering.

Many of us in Wind River Country and Fremont County owe Bernie much more than we know. If he is incarcerated, our progress will be dealt a serious blow. His knowledge and understanding of our community and State has made him a strong advocate for our needs. Bernie has developed very current and usable data on the improvement in our community as the result of the programs he nursed into operation.

Lastly, Bernie's past and present commitment to sobriety in his life stands as a model of hope for many of us fighting substance abuse and its harmful effects. Bernie is as proud of adhering to the principles of AA as he is of his commitment to help the disenfranchised and suffering. Therefore, along with others who attest to Bernie's character, love of people, and devotion to helping, I also ask for leniency.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Scotty Ratliff