

Sandy Annabi asks for community service, not prison

Written by Jonathan Bandler

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NEW YORK — Former Yonkers Councilwoman Sandy Annabi is asking a judge to keep her out of prison when she is sentenced this month on federal corruption charges.

The burden of caring for her brothers when their parents were imprisoned on federal drug charges, her own psychological and medical issues, and years of hard work for her community are among the reasons cited in letters to the court from 150 relatives, friends, co-workers and constituents who seek leniency for Annabi.

“I am proud to call Sandy Annabi my sister, best friend and role model,” her brother, Samir Annabi, wrote. “She does not deserve this.”

The letters were included in a voluminous sentencing memorandum filed last month by Annabi’s lawyer, Edward Sapone, who asked U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon to reject federal guidelines calling for at least 6 1/2 years in prison, and instead sentence her to five years probation, 500 hours of community service, one year of home confinement, psychiatric counseling and restitution.

Annabi, 42, and her cousin and political mentor, Zehy Jereis, 41, were convicted earlier this year on conspiracy, extortion and other charges.

Jurors agreed with prosecutors that two key vote changes by Annabi in 2006 — approving the \$842 million Ridge Hill development and the so-called Longfellow School project that was eventually scrapped — were payback for nearly \$200,000 that Jereis spent on her, beginning when she first ran for office in 2001.

Jereis testified that the money he spent on Annabi was to win her love, not her vote.

Annabi was also convicted on mortgage- and tax-fraud charges.

Sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 19 in federal court in Manhattan.

McMahon has still not ruled on defense motions to set aside the verdicts based on insufficient evidence.

Sapone said prosecutors never proved that most of Jereis’ gifts were for Annabi to take official action and that his client had no idea that Ridge Hill developer Forest City Ratner gave Jereis a \$60,000 consulting job once Annabi voted for their project after two years of strong opposition.

Relatives called Annabi the rock of her family ever since she was a teenager, when her parents were arrested in a federal drug case. Her mother spent a year in prison and her father 13 years, forcing Annabi to work through high school and college.

Her dreams of becoming a prosecutor were dashed because financial hardships kept her from attending law school, relatives wrote.

Sapone suggested that Annabi was susceptible to Jereis’ political and personal efforts to gain her support, citing a psychiatrist’s assessment that she was naive when it came to others’ motivations.

He said Annabi’s parents are in failing health and need her now as much as ever and that she poses no threat to

society.

“She is a woman who has battled huge obstacles, and who has touched so many lives,” Sapone wrote. “There is no doubt that Ms. Annabi has learned a tough lesson, and that she will continue to make a positive impact in our community if given the opportunity.”