

Judge Reduces Pro Bono Client's 106.5-Year Sentence to 28 Years

Publications

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In a victory for pro bono client Robert Rollins, United States District Court Judge Gary Feinerman reduced Mr. Rollins' "stupendously long" sentence of 106.5 years to 28 years and one day. The decision means that rather than serve the remainder of his life in prison, Mr. Rollins should be free in a couple of years.

When he was 25 years old, Mr. Rollins was convicted for a string of three robberies within a week's time. No one was hurt during the offenses, and he stole less than \$10,000. In 2001, he was convicted of these offenses under a mandatory sentencing scheme whereby the trial judge sentenced him to 106.5 years.

Jenner & Block joined with a team from New York-based Debevoise & Plimpton to file a motion to reduce his sentence under the First Step Act. Last year, Judge Feinerman initially determined that he did not have authority to grant Mr. Rollins' motion for a reduction in sentence. The firm and Debevoise team appealed to the Seventh Circuit, which upon agreement of the parties, vacated the district court's ruling and remanded for further consideration.

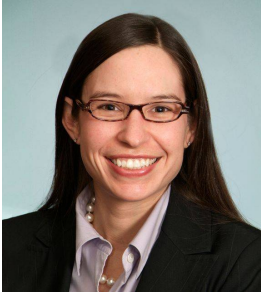
In the district court, the government continued to argue that Judge Feinerman was not empowered to reduce Mr. Rollins' sentence under the statute, and that even if he was, the sentence should remain 106.5 years. On March 17, Judge Feinerman reduced Mr. Rollins' sentence. The court ruled that Mr. Rollins' sentence was "exceedingly rare, resulting from the combination of the Government's charging decision and Rollins's decision to proceed to trial rather than cooperate and plead." While acknowledging the seriousness of Mr. Rollins' crimes, the judge wrote that "a de facto life sentence far exceeds appropriate punishment."

Judge Feinerman expressly noted that Mr. Rollins has a clean prison disciplinary record, voluntarily participated in a course focused on helping inmates appreciate the severity of their crimes and the impact they had on their victims, and has worked as a cook in prison.

"In short," the judge wrote, "he has demonstrated that he is committed to living a law-abiding life should he be given that chance." Mr. Rollins, a veteran, very much looks forward to rejoining his family, the workforce, and contributing to society.

The firm team included Partners Andrew W. Vail and Monica R. Pinciak, Associate Joshua M. Levin, and Paralegal Katherine Mehaffie. Partners Michael T. Brody, Anton R. Valukas, Reid J. Schar, and Dean N. Panos assisted with the team with a Seventh Circuit moot court.

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