



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of the Pardon Attorney

Washington, D.C. 20530

January 15, 2016

The Honorable Sally Quillian Yates
Deputy Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Sally:

I write today to resign my position as Pardon Attorney effective January 31, 2016.

I have reached this decision because I am unable to carry out my job effectively, despite my intense efforts to do so. I fully support and admire the Administration's groundbreaking and much-needed launch of the Clemency Initiative and the possibility of justice it brings to so many deserving people. I have worked tirelessly since day one to do all I can to make the Initiative a success. But given that the Department has not fulfilled its commitment to provide the resources necessary for my office to make timely and thoughtful recommendations on clemency to the President, given your statement that the needed staff will not be forthcoming, and given that I have been instructed to set aside thousands of petitions for pardon and traditional commutation, I cannot fulfill my responsibilities as Pardon Attorney.

In addition, as you know, I have been deeply troubled by the decision to deny the Pardon Attorney all access to the Office of White House Counsel, even to share the reasons for our determinations in the increasing number of cases where you have reversed our recommendations. I believe that prior to making the serious and complex decisions underlying clemency, it is important for the President to have a full set of views. For that reason, I am encouraged by the commitment now to share the Pardon Attorney's recommendations and rationale with White House Counsel. This will be important for my staff, who have considerable expertise on clemency matters; for my successor; and most important, for the integrity of the decision-making process.

As you may know, I began my legal career with the Department of Justice, given my deep dedication to its mission and values. I have been honored to serve as Pardon Attorney and to work for a President committed to the reinvigoration of the clemency process and the promise for justice that holds. But the position in which my office has been placed, asking us to address the petitions of nearly 10,000 individuals with so few attorneys and support staff, means that the requests of thousands of petitioners seeking justice will lie unheard. This is inconsistent with the mission and values to which I have dedicated my life, and inconsistent with what I believe the Department should represent.

I want to be as helpful as possible during the transition process so would appreciate your letting me know how I might best do that.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deborah Leff".

Deborah Leff
Pardon Attorney