

October 27, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
NW Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

I am writing from a federal penitentiary where I just started my tenth year of a life sentence without parole. Before this, I had never been in trouble with the law, and none of my convictions were violent. I would like to tell you how I got here and what I am doing to show you that I don't need to be kept here for the rest of my life.

In my teens and early twenties, I developed a passion for personal freedoms, equality and entrepreneurship. At 26, I made an e-commerce website called Silk Road that allowed people to buy and sell anonymously online. I thought at the time that I was promoting my ideals, but I have since learned what a terrible mistake I made. It was supposed to be a place where anyone could buy or sell whatever they chose so long as they weren't hurting someone else. But it turned out to be a very destructive idea because it was mostly used for selling illegal drugs.

Now, I am almost 39 and a very different man. Before, I had never been exposed to the harm drugs can cause, but that changed when I came to prison. For nearly a decade I have lived in close quarters with men who have life-long addictions to powerful, destructive drugs. Now I work with my fellow prisoners to overcome addiction and get their lives on track.

I am part of an evidence-based recidivism reduction program, where I have gained deep insights into the thinking errors and attitudes that led me to break the law. It has given me the opportunity to mentor others, especially those who are preparing to reenter society but are lacking the tools and support they need to be successful and not reoffend.

In all my years of prison, I have stayed out of conflict and never had a disciplinary sanction. When I first arrived at a maximum-security prison, I was told to assault another inmate or be assaulted myself. I refused, and by choosing peace, I found strength. Several of my fellow prisoners even chose to enter protective custody along with me, leaving their violent gang life behind.

Now I work with ex-gang members (with unimaginably violent pasts) to help them learn the path of peace. One man used to run a large section of L.A. for his gang. Tattooed from head to toe, conditioned from childhood that to show emotion is to show weakness and to show weakness is to become prey, this man and I shed tears together as we faced the pain we caused.

Over and over I see honesty, sobriety and remorse lead to positive change in people's lives. Witnessing those men come clean and get clean has been hugely rewarding and reinforced my understanding of the damage I caused by helping to promote drugs, but it has also given me a path forward in my own rehabilitation.

My contributions were recognized by the psychology staff here in the program, and I was invited to be on the mediation committee (and later became its chairman). Our mission is to create a safe haven where conflicts are resolved through communication and compromise, not violence. I am proud to say that, in all my time on the committee, we have had no physical altercations in the program while in the broader prison there have been multiple murders and frequent assaults.

I am also a suicide-watch companion. I sit with men who have lost hope and become suicidal. I am there to make sure they don't harm themselves and to show them that they are not alone. In addition, I am enrolled in a Master's program in psychology so I can better understand the struggles I and my fellow prisoners are going through and help them become the types of men that will benefit our society when released.

Something else I am doing to make amends is supporting charities. My family auctioned some of my art last year, and I asked that part of the proceeds go to charities that are dedicated to helping kids visit their incarcerated parents, lowering recidivism rates through successful re-entry, and providing harm reduction and treatment services to people with drugs addictions. These are important causes to me now.

Over countless hours, I have searched my soul and examined the misguided decisions I made when I was younger. I have dug deep and made a sincere effort to not just change what I do, but who I am. I am no longer the type of man who could break the law and let down so many.

I long to have a future once more. My fiancée has stood by me for all these years. We dream of getting married and starting a family. My mother has cancer, a heart condition and lives alone. I am failing as a son and a husband.

I know I could be—and yearn to be—a positive influence in the free world. Please give me a second chance so I can prove that I can be an asset to my community and country. If you see fit to commute my sentence, I will owe you my life, and I will never let you down.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RU', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ross Ulbricht