

(date)

Sample Letter

Charles C. Foti, Jr. Attorney General
1885 North 3rd Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
P.O. Box 94005
Baton Rouge, LA
70804
Executive@ag.state.la.us

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE JENA 6

Dear Charles C. Foti, Jr.:

The recent developments in the Lasalle Parish of Louisiana are an outrage. As a concerned citizen, I am asking you to investigate and monitor the criminal cases against six young African American men residing in Jena, Louisiana: Mr. Mychal Bell (17 years old), Mr. Bryan Purvis (17 years old), Mr. Theo Shaw (17 years old), Mr. Carwin Jones (18 years old), and a still unidentified individual.

The charges stem from a schoolyard fight with a white student at Jena High School. The fight was a culmination of a series of racially charged events. After asking school officials for permission, black students sat under the white tree, a tree where white students gather during breaks. The next day, three white students hung three nooses under the white tree. Instead of being expelled, the superintendent merely suspended the three white students for three days. In November 2006, someone torched one of school buildings. In December 2006, white students attacked an African American student at a party. The following day, a white man brandished a shotgun and threatened three black students.

Initially, the District Attorney attempted to charge Mychal Bell and the other young men with attempted second degree murder and conspiracy. However, on the day of Mychal Bell's trial, the District Attorney reduced the charges to aggravated battery and conspiracy. Moreover, the District Attorney did not bring similar charges against the white students involved in the other previously stated incidents. The District Attorney's actions raise serious questions regarding the validity of the charges.

Furthermore, other related actions by the District Attorney have furthered these concerns. Prior to the charges being brought against

these six young men, the District Attorney allegedly attended an assembly at the Jena High School and threatened students by saying, "I can take away your lives with the stroke of my pen." His comments were allegedly directed at African American students who protested against the school's lenient suspensions of the noose-hanging white students.

While there are competing views surrounding the situation, what is undeniably clear is that these young men are not being afforded the constitutional protections to which they are entitled. Mychal Bell, the first of these young men to be tried, is facing a possible maximum sentence of twenty two years in prison. Mr. Bell was tried by an all white jury. In addition, I am concerned about the quality of the legal representation that Mr. Bell received. During the trial, Mr. Bell's court appointed attorney called no witnesses and put on no evidence. If events such as these are to serve as any indication, then the other five young men still awaiting trial face a situation in which their chances for receiving justice are also in jeopardy.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to use your authority to investigate these matters and ensure that these young men's constitutional rights are safeguarded. Please contact me as soon as possible to let me know what you are doing to investigate the issues surrounding the trials of these young men. Please let me know what I can do to help.

Sincerely,

(sign and print you name
and be certain to include your address)

(insert date here)

Sample Letter

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Governor of the Great State of Louisiana
Office of the Governor
Attn: Constituent Services
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-90004
E-mail: contact@la.gov
Facsimile: 225-342-7099

RE: ENSURE THAT JUSTICE IS OBSERVED IN THE TRIALS OF MYCHAL BELL, ROBERT BAILEY, JR., THEO SHAW, CARWIN JONES, BRYANT PURVIS, AND AN UNIDENTIFIED MINOR (THE JENA 6).

Dear Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco;

The recent events in Jena, Louisiana have highlighted the continuing work that must be completed in the area of civil rights and race relations in the United States. As a United States citizen, who is concerned with the course of events in Jena, I am requesting that you work to ensure United States constitutional protections and Louisiana state constitutional protections are afforded these six American citizens and Louisiana residents.

Mr. Mychal Bell has been convicted and is awaiting sentencing for the crimes of aggravated battery and conspiracy to commit aggravated battery. Mr. Robert Bailey, Jr., Mr. Theo Shaw, Mr. Carwin Jones, Mr. Bryant Purvis, and an unidentified minor are awaiting trial for attempted second degree murder.

The fight was the culmination of weeks of on-school and off-school harassment, intimidation, and assault. In September 2006, a group of African-American students observed nooses hanging in a tree they previously sat under. Tensions in the small city heightened after three Caucasian-American students, who admitted to hanging the nooses, were punished with in-school suspension. Next, African-American students organized a sit-in demonstration. The students were graced with an appearance from the District Attorney. The District Attorney allegedly made numerous disparaging remarks, including, "I can take away your lives with the stroke of my pen". In November 2006, the school was torched. In December 2006, an African-American student was physically assaulted at an off-school party by Caucasian-American students. The next day, three African-American students were confronted, at a convenience store, at gun-point, by a white man. The victims successfully wrestled the gun away from the aggressor, only to be arrested. The aggressor was neither arrested nor charged. Please do not allow this cycle of injustice to continue unchecked.

In Mychal Bell's case, his constitutional rights were not protected. Mr. Bell was tried by an all white jury in a racially charged case. There are serious concerns regarding the quality of legal representation that Mr. Bell received. Mr. Bell's court appointed public defender did not call any witnesses nor introduce any evidence. Now, Mr. Bell may receive the maximum sentence of 22 years in prison.

I am concerned about the prosecutor's use of discretion. The District Attorney prosecuting Mr. Bell's case may have had conflicts of interests that may have affected his judgment in bringing the charges. On the day of Mr. Bell's trial, the District Attorney decided to reduce the charges from attempted second degree murder to aggravated battery and conspiracy to commit aggravated battery. The District Attorney did use his discretion when he decided not charge the individuals who hung nooses, assaulted residents at gun-point,

and continually harassed citizens in a similarly aggressive fashion as he prosecuted the Jena 6. The law should apply equally to all citizens.

The District Attorney's troubling behavior was evident when he allegedly informed high-school students that the display of nooses is an "innocent prank" and that a public official, elected to serve and protect the citizens, "can be your best friend or your worst enemy. I can take away your lives with the stroke of my pen."

I trust that you will exercise your authority to faithfully support the Constitution and laws of Louisiana and the United States of America. I am confident that you will work to ensure that Mychal Bell, Robert Bailey, Jr., Theo Shaw, Carwin Jones, Bryant Purvis, and an unidentified minor are afforded every constitutional right they are entitled to by law. I request that you and your administration monitor the Jena 6 situation and take appropriate actions.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name
and be certain to include your address)