

**Statement by
Zandononi Day**

**Hearing on
“Female D.C. Code Felons: Unique Challenges in Prison and At Home”**

July 27, 2010

Hello, My name is Zandononi Day and I am a 47-year-old mother of 3 who has been a convicted felon since 1986. I am here today to testify about the obstacles that have been placed in my path. Hopefully the information that I provide during this testimony will shine a light on what is needed to assist us with a smooth transition back into society. I have been in and out of the criminal justice system for a long time and my last and hopefully final conviction was August 2007 where I was charged with Distribution of Cocaine. I plead guilty to this charge and was sentenced to 24 months of incarceration. I was sentence under DC Code. I was sent to USP Hazelton on April 21, 2008 to finish out the 14 months that I had left. To some degree I believe that being under DC Code was better than being a federal inmate. I was placed in a new facility close to home and I had total family support and contact throughout my period of incarceration. I must say that no one wants to be incarcerated, but being close to home at a facility where it is easy for family to visit makes a big difference.

I would now like to address the issue of reunification. By the time I was incarcerated, my children where all grown and were able to make their own decision as to whether or not they wanted to deal with me and thank God that they wanted me in their lives. They welcomed me home and did what ever they could to assist me.

Upon my release, I was sent to Fairview Halfway house to finish my sentence and was released back into society fully on September 15, 2009. I must say that having a halfway house is a good idea but their needs to be more support. They need to address all the issues that we are facing and not just the one about being unemployed. You have ladies that do not have employable skill and you have ladies that do not want to return to or cannot return to the work that they once did before their incarceration. I believe that the option of training should be available more than the fact that we just need to find a job. I was facing this issue. Before my incarceration I was bus driver, my license expired and I did not have the means to pay for another CDL. In turn, I sought training with National Housing Corporation Learning Center where I studied Mortgage Loan Processing. The Department of Employment Services funded this class and I was paid a stipend of 400.00 a month. My case manager at DOES was so inspirational that any time that I felt like giving up she would call me with words of encouragement and keep me motivated. Special thanks to Ms. Powell for being there. I completed my training in the top 5 percent of my class. Upon applying or jobs in this field, either there was an issue about experience, credit worthiness or incarceration. The bottom line was I was unable to be placed because I am a convicted felon. Mind you, I do not have any crimes that I have committed against any bank. I have a drug conviction. Let me back up a little. Before

being released from Fairview, I requested referrals from the employment counselor to be sent to Our Place DC. This is where my help really began. I was able to sit with the staff and address the issues that was preventing me from obtain fulltime employment and together we found a program that will give me employable skill.

While attending school at NHCLC the staff there assisted me with obtaining clothing suitable for interviewing and I proceeded to seek employment. Because I did not have a computer at home to do the necessary research and homework required for this class, the staff at Our Place DC allowed me to come to their office and do my homework. I was so grateful to them that I went to the office everyday. The staff encouraged me to fill out a scholarship application and I did and was awarded a scholarship to buy a laptop of my own. I still went to Our Place everyday because I wanted to see the staff. I became a fixture at Our Place and the staff kept me on point. I am grateful to the staff of Our Place DC for their support. I was able to get more clothing from Our Place and I participated in career central and did what ever was asked of me. Many doors were closed in my face because of my criminal conviction but I couldn't give up. I went to employment discussion groups presented by Our Place DC; I spoke one on one with my Mentor (Ms. Tracye Payne), I talked with a therapist who helped me sought out my feelings about what was happening. I have always had employable skills either as a bus driver or an Administrative Assistant/Office Manager. But I just could not get a job anywhere.

A fellow student convinced me to take a class with Liberty Tax and that is where I met my current employer (Ms. Herberta J. Jones). I went to Ms. Jones open and honest and to my surprise she hired me as a part time Tax Preparer. (Thank God for Ms. Jones). Since being employed with Ms. Jones, I continued to seek full time employment with other organizations and once again I got the "we will get back to you." I wasn't allowed to give up.

During my incarceration, I participated in any class I thought would make me a better person. The staff at Hazelton tried to provide as much support as possible to the ladies who were serious about turning over a new leaf. I was serious. I took classes like Life Makeover, How to Start you Own Business, Grant Writing and Pre-release prep. I went and successfully completed a number of classes that were given by my fellow inmates, prison staff and Our Place DC. I believe that because I allowed my self to think in a different way, I am successful no matter what. Ms. Star the release prep teacher (prison staff) put together information that was helpfully to me in finding resources in the Washington DC area.

Oh I forgot. My fulltime position with Liberty Tax ended April 15, 2010 and I went to a part time position where I was paid one day a week on an as needed basis. My mentor would say to me "why not volunteer, at least you will be unemployed and gain some skills," so I did what she suggested. I was a volunteer for the Herberta J. Jones Insurance and Financial Services Agency from May 1, 2010 until July 23, 2010 where I am now a contract employee. Ms. Jones also encouraged me to take the Property and Casualty Insurance class so that I could become licensed to sell insurance. I applied for another scholarship with Our Place DC and was award the scholarship and was able to pay PG

Community College for the class. I successfully completed the P&C Class in May of 2010. Unfortunately, I failed the state exam by 6 points but I am determined to retake the test and pass. Once again, my criminal conviction is playing a part in me getting appointed. I applied with Nationwide Insurance and they denied me appointment because of my criminal history and once again, I do not have any crimes of insurance fraud.

I am telling you this because I believe that the biggest problem that we face is employment. I am a smart and intelligent individual who made some wrong choices and I have paid for the choices that I have made. When does society stop making me pay? I have been exploring the option of applying for apartments and once again I was discouraged because every one is making your criminal record an obstacle in getting housing. Where do I go from here? I would for once like for others to judge me and not my criminal record. I admit to everything that I did and I take responsibility for it, when does society allow me a chance?