

Testimony of Dianne M. Daniels, AICI – Executive Director
Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc.
February 20, 2007

Senate Bill 1030: *AN ACT PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS SEEKING PARDONS.*

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Dianne M. Daniels, and I am proud and happy to be the Executive Director of the Connecticut Pardon Team. I am here to request your support of Senate Bill 1030, which would require the Board of Pardons and Paroles to contract for a program that provides technical assistance for persons desiring to go through the pardons process to residents who were convicted of a crime, have successfully completed their probation or parole and have not been convicted of a crime for at least five years.

The Connecticut Pardon Team is the only non-profit organization directly providing the technical assistance to persons desiring to go through the pardon process – we have been providing the information to interested persons for nearly 3 years.

When Jacqueline Caron came to me in 2004 and suggested we start holding informational sessions on how to prepare and file an application for a non-inmate pardon, I was glad to participate. Though I do not have a conviction in my background, I am familiar with the challenges faced by those individuals with a record. Our current system provides for punishment for the commission of a crime in the form of a prison sentence, or possibly probation. Once that period has ended, there may be a time of parole, but after that, it's supposed to be over.

Many ex-offenders are unable to get jobs that would lead to real careers – some have advanced degrees that they are unable to use, and still others have no incentive to increase their skills or education because since the tragedy on September 11th, background checks have become much more stringent. A conviction from 10 or more years ago that might not have held an individual back prior to September 11, will certainly turn up in a background check performed today.

How long is long enough? Our criminal justice system assigns a sentence – the punishment that fit the crime committed – but in reality, being found guilty of a crime can result in a life sentence – served one week, one month or one year at a time.

The Connecticut Pardon Team's four-phase Pardon Assistance Program is designed to help ex-offenders break the cycle of recidivism that currently plagues our criminal justice system. By helping ex-offenders who have been

conviction-free for at least 5 years to begin the process of applying for a pardon, we give them hope. Hope for a normal life where they can check off the box that says they don't have a conviction on their record when applying for a job or a promotion. Hope that they can finally put their education and experience to work – which will afford them the ability to care for their families, to purchase a home, to lift themselves out of poverty.

Since beginning our informational forums in 2004, there has been a decrease in the number of petitions denied at pre-screening; a reduction in the number of petitions denied at the full hearing, and an increase in the percentage of pardons granted from 43% to 58% between November 2004 and May 2006.

We have provided information to well over 2,500 individuals through our forums; over 4,100 individuals via our website; and over 300 phone calls and messages. The people who attend our forums are as diverse as the 24-year old who wants to turn their life around; the 30-something mother who wants to volunteer at her child's school, but is afraid to because her conviction might show up in a background check; the 70-plus senior citizen who committed a minor crime when he was 18 and wants to clear his record before his death so that his grandchildren don't ever find out he had a record. These are the stories we hear and the people we help. Your support of Senate bill 1030 will enable us to help not only these people, but hundreds and thousands of others.

We are currently scheduled to do informational forums in New Britain and Stamford before the end of this month, with forums in Bridgeport and here in Hartford in the planning stages. We also have volunteers poised to help expand the programs in New Haven and Hartford so that the maximum number of Connecticut residents who need this information and individualized help will get it.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 1030 so that even more people across the state of Connecticut can be provided with the technical assistance, information and tools they need to help change their lives.

Thank you very much for your time,

Dianne M. Daniels, AICI – Executive Director
Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc.