

Tonya Jones

So many times injustice happens to individuals on a daily basis. I think as a culture and society we have become used to being treated in some cases subserviently and we have accepted situations and circumstances that are unequal to what is typically called normal. I can certainly apply this thought process to myself in the past especially after I lost my vision. I became hopeless for a while and accepted people, places and things that I did not have to accept. It was not until I understood internally that I am still a whole person to equal protection and due process under our laws.

Laws will not change until as a people we demand equality. It first starts with the individual. I look forward to opportunities to stand up for myself. Not necessarily as a blind individual but as Tonya Jones. I know and believe that I am a whole person and that I have all the rights that any other U.S. citizen productively contributing to society. There are times that I imagine the word disabled disappearing. I honestly prefer being referred to as differently abled. I do not consider myself to be limited in any way. Of course there are things that I have had to give up such as driving but that does not mean that I can never drive. As a social worker to disabled adults in Los Angeles, California. I was honored to be a part of client's journey towards obtaining their goals.

I had one client whose dream was to be an astronaut. I remember the state representative stating that this goal was unrealistic and should be changed something viable. I was offended at the thought that my client's dream was assumed to be out of reach and unachievable. I suggested going to Boeing Air Plant and taking a tour and participating in the activities they have there for those interested in planes. They even have a chamber where you are dressed as an astronaut and experience zero gravity, this achieving my client's dream and goal with modifications. As the process to having laws meet the needs of disabled individuals, it will also take disabled individuals having as much information as possible. There are several protections that cover disabled adults in almost every social situation that many are unaware of. As I prepared and researched to write this essay I came across protections and laws that cover disabled adults when one is traveling. These protections are covered under the Air Carrier Access Act. Which according to the Department of Justice states: The Air Carrier Access Act prohibits discrimination in air transportation by domestic and foreign air carriers against qualified individuals with physical or mental impairments. It applies only to air carriers that provide regularly scheduled services for hire to the public. Requirements address a wide of range of issues including boarding assistance and certain accessibility features in newly built aircraft a new or altered airport facilities. People may enforce rights under the Air Carrier Access Act by filing complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation, or by bringing a lawsuit in Federal court. I never would have imagined that I am allowed to board an aircraft with assistance according to federal law. I was unaware because I have never taken the time to inform myself, I have as I stated before accepted people, places and things as they are presented because I have not taken the time to inform myself. After attending the NFB conference, I feel empowered and know there is a strong force of professional

and competed sighted and blind individuals roaring beside me fighting for equality. I also learned during this year's conference that the Department of Justice is a great accessible resource providing information and access to any and all status and laws pertaining to individuals with disabilities. The Department of Justice is also responsible for bringing lawsuits against those who violate our rights as disabled individuals. As I study to become a teacher I have been reviewing laws and statutes that protect and entitle special education students to free public education. One act in particular that came to be law as of special education students to free public education. One act in particular that came to be law as of 1975 called IDEA Individual with Disabilities Education Act that entitles children with disabilities as defined in the American with Disabilities Act to a free public education in most unrestricted environment. I grew up in Southern California where there was a state ran mental institution in Channel Islands. I remember seeing people walking in groups chained with cuffs and linked together sort of like a chain gang for prison inmates. People were maintained instead of supported. I think how many of the families who had loved ones at or in institutions were aware of the conditions disabled family member were forced to endure. I have learned that according to the Americans with Disabilities Act there are several statutes and laws that prohibit unequal treatment in educational and boarding that Channel Islands Mental Hospital violated on a daily basis. As of today this state ran facility has been shut down and many families have been compensated for the maltreatment of disabled family members in state's care. I would have to be a part of a mindset that lives life unaware and uninformed. I am in the process of applying for a license to teach in the state of New Mexico. My goal is to obtain a master's degree in special education and then attend law school majoring in civil rights and disability law. I am strong believer in the fact that without equal access to information we become disconnected and lose power. Laws will never change to benefit the individuals they are designed to support and protect if those individuals do not take a stand and demand equality. Preparing for this essay has ignited a flame in my heart to remember for myself first to always have information and access the resources that are available so that I can understand and know my rights as a citizen. I also encourage those who are thought to be disabled but in fact are actually differently abled to stay connected, stay informed and continue to fight powerful until laws reflect the facts and needs of all people demanding equality and justice.