

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 14, 2017

**CONTACT: MARYAM JUDAR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/COMMUNITY
LAWYER, CITIZENADVOCACY CENTER**
OFFICE: [630.833.4080](tel:630.833.4080); CELL: [310-709-7081](tel:310-709-7081)

**CAC RELEASES GOVERNMENT SURVEY OF “RIGHT TO SPEAK” POLICIES
AT GOVERNMENT MEETINGS AND CALLS ON GOVERNMENT BODIES
TO IMPROVE PUBLIC COMMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Elmhurst – In 2011 the Illinois’ Open Meetings Act (OMA) was amended to mandate “Any person shall be permitted an opportunity to address public officials under the rules established and recorded by the public body.” The Citizen Advocacy Center conducted a comparative online analysis of municipalities in the collar counties analyzing how they have responded to the public comment requirement and establishing rules. CAC also analyzed current municipal practices as compared to data collected prior to the “Right to Speak” provision was adopted (CAC’s 2010 Public Comment Policies Survey).

Four themes emerged from CAC’s online survey of 150 municipalities in the collar counties:

- A dramatic improvement in recording rules for public comment but significant variance regarding where rules were posted and in the complexity of finding the rules.
- An increase in content-neutral time limits on public comment periods and on individual public comments. There was a 144% increase from 2010 where 36 municipalities imposed a time limit on the length of each public comment and/or on the entire public comment period as compared to 88 in 2017.
- An increase in speaker identification requirements. There was nearly a 100% increase in municipalities that required or requested members of the public to sign-in prior to giving a public comment at the meeting. Also, more municipalities require speakers to state their name and/or address; 44 municipalities required or asked the speakers to state their name; 35 of the 44 also required or asked the speaker to state their address.
- An increase in decorum, or content based rules during public comment. In 2010, 24 municipalities had content-based rules in their public comment policies; in 2017, 48 municipalities had policies that included content-based regulations on public comment, a 100% increase. Fifteen (15) imposed *civility* of some sort while 41 regulated *negative* content in some way.

“Citizen participation in government is a cornerstone principle of our democracy, and one crucial way to participate is speaking at government meetings. The OMA right to speak amendment has made a vast difference in the public’s ability to address public officials. At the same, an increase in rules requiring civility and prohibition on negative speech is concerning, and a potentially serious civic barrier, because it is unknown how many speakers choose *not* to participate simply because they are uncertain as to how public bodies apply decorum rules,” said Maryam Judar, CAC’s Executive Director and Community Lawyer.

The “2017 Right to Speak Government Survey Report” is available at <http://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org/public-comment-survey.html>.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a 501(c)(3) community legal organization dedicated to building democracy for the 21st century. For nearly two decades CAC has been a leader in making Illinois government more transparent, accountable, and accessible to the citizenry through advancing policies that keep open the doors of government and empowering the citizenry to engage in the democratic process.

###