

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

Seasonal Newsletter from the Citizen Advocacy Center and Citizens in the Western Suburbs

FALL 2000

CAC STUDIES TEN YEARS OF DUPAGE COUNTY CONTRACTING RECORDS

The Center is undertaking a study aimed at analyzing how taxpayers' dollars have been spent on DuPage County's awarding of contracts over a ten year period beginning in 1989. The study will analyze County contracting data to determine whether all legally required procedures and practices were applied by the County while purchasing goods and services or whether some level of administrative discretion was instead applied in awarding contracts for goods and services.

The study will also analyze the extent, if any, to which campaign contributions to DuPage-based, state and local elected officials factored into the price, timing, and number of contracts awarded to vendors competing for County dollars. Both sets of data, the financial records and the campaign contributions will become part of an interactive database which will then be available on the Internet for the public to use.

The Center has compiled hundreds of pages of records of campaign contributions made to state and local DuPage-based elected officials for the past ten years. These records are being entered into a database and will be correlated against the contracting information. Unfortunately, the Center has been delayed in its attempts to obtain the County's contracting data and as a result was forced to file a lawsuit against the County under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain access to the records.

The Center intends to use this project to document how the public's assets have been spent. If public assets have been spent in an inefficient manner, then the Center will push for reforms for eliminating or reducing waste. In the end, the Center hopes to educate the public about laws governing the procurement process as well as how campaign finance reform alternatives can be implemented to insure the public's assets are not used as a discretionary source for political paybacks.

GIVING STUDENTS A VOICE

CAC community lawyers implemented a civic program to teach principles of democracy to Junior High students. During a four week after-school program, Center lawyers visited Indian Trails Junior High School to educate students about how to put democratic concepts into action and exploring different concepts of community.

Projects involved exercises demonstrating that students have a right to voice an opinion, making collages reflecting the different communities students belonged to, and creating a children's bill of rights. The bill of rights activity provided an opportunity to discuss individual responsibilities which accompany individual rights and the impending presidential election provided an opportunity to talk with the students about their concerns for the future. Students concerns were issues such as freedom of speech, health insurance, transportation, and the environment.

Center lawyers are compiling "Democracy in Action" lesson plans to help teachers facilitate hands-on activities to teach about democracy and civics and how to use a student's community as a "civic lab."

CITIZEN TRAINING CORPS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29,

EVENING PROGRAMS

November: KidCare

Children deserve to have health care coverage.

The Citizen Advocacy Center's Evening Program for November will focus on Illinois' version of a national Child Health Insurance Program: KidCare.

Ms. Donna Sperlakis from the Health Education Department of DuPage County will describe details of this pilot program funded through a grant from the Chicago Community Trust.

Children without health insurance are less likely to receive basic rounds of immunizations, and their health needs may be ignored until they are so serious that they require immediate and expensive emergency care. Children who have health insurance and access to preventive care are sick less often so they miss fewer days of school and parents do not miss as many days of work. In DuPage County there are an estimated 12,000 children who are uninsured and eligible for KidCare. KidCare was created as an answer to the high number of uninsured children and the high cost of private health insurance.

KidCare is a free or low cost health insurance program for income eligible children through the age of 18 and pregnant women and their babies. A family of four with an annual income of \$31,568 would qualify for KidCare. KidCare provides services such as immunizations, hospital care, dental care, emergency room services, eye care and more. Children and pregnant women who meet the income requirements may be eligible for one of the

- KidCare Assist covers children's health care with no co-pays or premiums.
- KidCare Moms & Babies covers health care for pregnant women and their children up to one year of age with no co-pays or premiums.
- KidCare Share covers children's health care with \$2 co-pays for medical visits and prescription medicines.
- KidCare Premium covers children's health care with \$5 co-pays for medical visits and name brand prescription medicines and \$3 co-pays for generic prescription medicines. Premiums are \$15 for one child, \$25 for 2 children, and \$30 for 3 or more children.
- KidCare Rebate is for children who already have health insurance that covers physician and hospital services. This program reimburses the employee part of the monthly premium paid for the children's health insurance.

Visit the Citizen Advocacy Center Wednesday, NOVEMBER 28, 7:30 PM to learn more about this innovative effort to keep Illinois children healthy!

December: Midwifery

The Citizen Advocacy Center's Evening Program for December will focus on Midwifery in Illinois.

Valerie Vickerman Morris, RN and direct entry midwife from the Illinois Coalition for

Midwifery, will speak. The Illinois Coalition for Midwifery seeks to ensure the availability of safe, licensed midwifery services to the citizens of Illinois. The coalition supports the Certified Professional Midwife credential as a basis for license requirements. They also promote informed birthing choices and the Midwifery Model of Care. Through cooperation, education and legislation, they strive to make choosing a Certified Professional Midwife available to all families in Illinois.

Valerie Vickerman Morris and Attorney Ken Runes will discuss midwifery in Illinois, the battle between Illinois midwives and the Illinois' Department of Professional Responsibility, current midwifery complaints pending administrative review, and the possibility of a 1983 suit in federal court.

Illinois FIRST

I am currently a student enrolled in American Politics at the College of DuPage. Service learning was an option to receive credit toward the final grade. The Citizen

Advocacy Center was the perfect approach to participate hands-on in a civics lesson and in a non-partisan manner.

Community Lawyer, Terry Pastika, suggested an interesting research project. She wanted information on Governor Ryan's Illinois FIRST program. Actually, I was wondering about this topic myself. Road construction was becoming more apparent within and around the western suburbs with signs announcing, "Another project funded by Governor Ryan's Illinois FIRST".

In my reading, I discovered this initiative was proposed by Governor Ryan in 1999 as an extension of Governor Thompson's, "Building Illinois," which was a modest \$2 billion program. Governor Ryan was able to achieve bi-partisan acceptance of his \$12 billion Funds for Infrastructure, Roads, Schools and Transit (FIRST). Much discussion ensued in the Illinois General Assembly as to how this proposal would be funded and what projects would be selected. The source of funding debate led to many bills being signed to increase drivers license renewals fees and liquor taxes. Schools may get financial help if they raise a percentage of the cost of their projects and road projects could qualify for an infusion of federal funds as well.

Illinois FIRST project selection would be based on "need" and the improved "quality of life" attained by project completion. Project selection runs the gamut: new classrooms for overcrowded schools to land acquisition, a study for a third airport to bike paths and museums. The most obvious current projects are the construction on the "Hillside Strangler" and the Dan Ryan Expressway.

As a taxpayer, I must admit "sticker" shock at the increase to \$78 for vehicle license renewal. However, the reality of the conditions of our roads and neglect of the infrastructure can only serve to increase maintenance costs for our vehicles. It makes sense to promote direct results from this increase and address our most urgent needs. It is my concern however, that projects selected must be necessary and that money dispersed is for the common good through the five year run of this initiative.

Andrea Robins

Who's Voting (or not) in DuPage County?

For my COD political science class, I was required to do 20 hours of community service with a community organization. I chose to work at the Citizen Advocacy Center, and was pleasantly surprised with my assignment. I was asked to research voter turnout in recent elections at the local and national level. Using the Center's Internet resources I compiled information about voter turnout in Illinois. What I found surprised me.

I discovered that since 1992, the percentage turnout of the voting age population in Illinois has decreased by 20%, while the voting age population has increased by almost 200,000 people. In addition, the number of registered voters has decreased by almost 100,000. This information was disappointing, because it demonstrates that teens are not registering to vote when they turn eighteen. It is evidence that young people are developing a disinterest in the political system.

In 1992 there were 6,600,358 registered voters in Illinois, and 5,050,157 of them voted. By 1998, the numbers are dramatically different: 6,493,881 registered, and 3,394,521 voted. People who are registered to vote are not bothering to vote. What has caused this dramatic decrease in voter turnout? I know among my peers, there is no motivation to vote. I was taught that in a democracy, voting was the most important step in the political process, but if people are not voting, where is our democracy?

In DuPage County, only 27% of registered voters actually voted in the March 21, 2000 General Primary Election. Registered voters totaled 475,706, and the number of ballots counted was 129,570. Research for voter turnout at local elections yielded similar and lower numbers. These low election turnouts surprised me, but also educated me on the status of Illinois voters. I now have a cause to urge my friends and peers to vote. I hope the November 2000 election breaks this disturbing trend.

Everyday Democracy is a publication of the *Citizen Advocacy Center*, a non-profit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) corporation. Submissions from citizen advocates in the western suburbs of Chicago are encouraged.

The *Center* is an educational and charitable organization dedicated to building democracy for the 21st century by strengthening the public's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance.

If you are interested in more information, becoming a volunteer, or making a tax-deductible contribution to the *Center*, please feel free to contact or visit us.

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Marc Jolin and Judy Meima from the Statewide Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) visited the Center in October to facilitate an introductory workshop titled: Tax Increment Financing, An Organizer's Guide. "TIF is the fastest growing

urban renewal program in Illinois. It is used all over the state, from empty fields outside small towns in Southern Illinois to the Gold Coast in downtown Chicago." SHAC representatives discussed the basic principles of TIF, starting with explaining what a TIF district is to the specific criteria a municipality must meet in order to implement a TIF district. The workshop covered topics such as how to amend TIF's and the municipal reporting requirements.

A recently formed community group attended the workshop and asked questions ranging from how to get neighbors' names on the interested parties registry, how many housing units must be effected before recent legislative changes apply and how to use the press to their advantage. SHAC representatives answered questions posed as well as how TIF impacts housing, school districts, jobs and taxes, and how TIFs may benefit a community. SHAC representatives distributed several *Community Organizing Guides* at the workshop and also left several copies at the Center for public use. The Guide is a comprehensive manual explaining TIFs and community organizing strategies.

HOLIDAY CHEER PARTY

All Center donors and volunteers are welcome to attend an Open House from 5:00-9:00 p.m. at the Center on Tuesday, December 5 for holiday cheer.

Thank you for making the Center's sixth year so productive!

COMMUNITY LAWYERS IN ACTION

Community Organizing

A concerned citizen learned that aldermen in her municipality were in the beginning stages of creating a TIF district, part of which would be located in her neighborhood. She discovered that if the TIF district were implemented, her house, as well as several houses in her neighborhood, would be bought by the city and demolished. Sick to her stomach over the possibility of being forced from her home, she visited the Center to learn what she could do to fight the purposed TIF.

Community lawyer Terry Pastika explained what a TIF district is, what elements a municipality must meet to create the TIF district and how a community coalition can impact TIF development. The citizen learned specific community organizing techniques such as: building a neighborhood coalition with individuals directly and indirectly affected by the TIF, using the media to educate the community, signing on the interested party registry list, lobbying aldermen, making FOIA requests to gather TIF information and contacting local taxing districts which will be affected by the TIF. During the course of learning community building, she also learned details of how her local government operates. After preliminary meetings, the Center sponsored a community-organizing workshop on TIFs and invited the newly formed community group. Fortunately, this community group became involved in the TIF process before the municipality passed a TIF ordinance, and discovered that they have a strong argument against the city to exclude their neighborhood from the proposed TIF district.

Government Accountability

An individual visited the Center after making a FOIA request for a plat of survey for neighborhood properties with the DuPage County Department of Development and Storm Water. His FOIA request was denied as well as his FOIA appeal. Community lawyer, Laurel O'Sullivan helped the citizen determine what further action could be taken. After the denial of a FOIA appeal, either the State's Attorney or an individual may file a complaint against the public body. He chose to pursue government accountability himself and with the help of the Center community lawyer, filed a *pro se* complaint (a complaint where an individual represents himself), despite the high \$210 filing fee.

Once the complaint was filed, the public agency decided to provide the citizen with the requested information. Even though the citizen received the public information, he still wants to have his day in court to inform the judge about the nonrefundable personal expense and the unnecessary obstacles he encountered in order to obtain public information. This citizen's struggle to obtain public information under FOIA illustrates the need for legislative amendments to FOIA in the spring 2001 legislative session. Citizens need an avenue to enforce FOIA laws that do not cost citizens hundreds of dollars, such as mediation with a state's attorney after an appeal denial.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Legal Guides

- Election Law
- Illinois School Law
- Municipal Law and Practice
- Civic Activism Books

Computer Access

- Westlaw Online Research Package
- DSL Internet Access
- Computers
- Printers

General Office Supplies

- File Cabinets: large and small
- Office Chairs
- Postage Meter
- Book Cases
- Photo Albums
- Digital Camera

Dear Fellow Citizen:

All year long the staff and volunteers of the Citizen Advocacy Center dedicate their time, talents, and treasure to building democracy for the 21st Century. We are pioneers in community lawyering, organizing, and civic education. The Center brings people together to share, to learn, to motivate, and to promote citizen activism. If you were one of the hundreds of volunteers who donated time or money to the Center this year, thank you.

We depend on your generosity.

Much is new at the Center this year! We are working with City Year, an AmeriCorps program, to educate and train our youth on civic issues. Our community lawyers have also developed a civics program for middle school students. We are close to completing our "Procurement Project" which is researching the relationship between campaign contributions and the awarding of contracts in DuPage County, and which will serve as a model for other communities seeking to promote campaign finance reform. The 2nd annual Civic Fair, which brought citizen groups and the public together, was held in June and planning for the 3rd is well under way. Our interns did an excellent job this year! With their help we were able to open the doors of government to more people. They researched and produced brochures on a wide variety of topics including tax increment financing, civics education, soaring gasoline prices, and Illinois health care. Center staff spoke at over 100 conferences, meetings, seminars and congressional hearings. Of course we still have our mentoring programs, Brown Bag Lunch sessions, evening programs, Citizen Corps, and our efforts to hold the Toll Authority responsible to the citizens of Illinois.

We have a wish list.

The staff would like to expand our educational programs, legal in-take assistance programs, and informational brochures. To help us keep pace with technology, we need newer computers with more up-to-date software. A "moving message sign" in our window, replacing the paper banners taped to our windows, would be great. We need a new storefront rug and new office chairs, our phones need to be replaced, and our law library needs to be kept current.

**Campaign Finance Reform · Citizen Corps · Tollway Accountability
Civic Education · Mentoring · Community Outreach · Civic Fair**

We depend on your individual donations to advance our mission of building democracy for the 21st Century. Together we can make a difference.

Please send your contribution in the enclosed envelope today!

With best wishes for a joyful holiday season and a happy new year,