

# EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER'S SEASONAL NEWSLETTER, SECOND EDITION, 2007

## **Benedictine University Youth Government Day**

The Citizen Advocacy Center (Center) had the opportunity of presenting at the Second Annual Benedictine University Youth Government Day. The event is organized by Jim Ryan, former Illinois Attorney General and current Director of the Center for Civic Leadership and Public Service at Benedictine University. More than 300 high school students from over 10 high schools attended the event.

The Center's role in Youth Government Day was to educate students about how citizens can impact government decision-making and how to evaluate issues of public concern. While difficult to do with 300 students, a Center community lawyer facilitated a hands-on activity wherein students practiced various organizing techniques. Students were divided into groups of 10 and assigned one of five fact patterns concerning issues the Center has been contacted about. The fact patterns included concerns about MySpace, cell phone use at school, closed campus lunches, restrictions on teenage driving, and drug testing of high school students. After reading their fact pattern, each group had to complete an organizing worksheet in which they identified the policy decision-makers, the reasons for the current policy, a range of solutions that the students wanted, the most effective arguments to achieve desired solutions, and various actions students could take to accomplish their desired goals.

The students enthusiastically completed the activity and everyone was impressed by the creativity of student action ideas. Some students, depending on the issue, even agreed that significant restrictions should be in place for high school students in order to ensure safety and security. The level of leadership and intellect displayed by the students was impressive. In addition to the Center's presentation, there was a panel presentation about "Careers in Public Service," a keynote address about the Bill of Rights by University of Chicago Law Professor Geoffrey Stone, and a presentation about judicial independence. The culmination of the day was a presentation by Evan Thomas, the Assistant Managing Editor of *Newsweek*. Mr. Thomas gave a thought-provoking speech on the various presidential candidates. The Youth Government Day was a fantastic forum that provided students with a valuable opportunity to examine the rights, responsibilities, and roles of citizens in government.

## **Mark Your Calendar for the Citizen Advocacy Center's**

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Annual

Intern

Presentation

Night

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Every summer the Center hosts law student, college students, and high school students from around the country. Student interns learn what "community lawyering" means by working under the direction of Center lawyers on public policy projects, answering public inquiries, facilitating presentations, and community organizing.

Join us at the Center to hear our interns discuss their summer projects.

July 18, 2007

7 PM

238 N. York Rd.  
Elmhurst.

## A Taste of Public Interest Law

Reflecting upon my most recent college semester, it was one of the most rewarding and interesting I have had in the past several years. This was due to the time I spent volunteering at the Center. I devoted as much time as possible two days a week throughout the semester to help out wherever I could. I found the Center to be exactly what I needed: an introduction into governmental oversight and public interest concerns.

I primarily focused on two projects. The first was analyzing the various ways that municipalities in DuPage County allotted time for public comment at council meetings and whether or not there were restrictions upon free speech. I surveyed all of the municipal codes for the respective entities in DuPage County and compiled a spreadsheet which highlighted all of the municipalities with questionable or ambiguous practices. This information was then integrated into a legal analysis of the First Amendment and public comment policies.

The second project was the Midwest Open Government Project. The Center received a grant to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the Freedom of Information Acts and Open Meetings Acts for Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. My task consisted of developing a topical index of all the statutes and case law regarding the Acts for those states. It was a daunting task that allowed me to dive into the world of how legal cases interpret state statutes.

In the end, I learned a great deal from my time at the Center. I got a taste of public interest law at the local level and forged excellent professional contacts. I like to think my time has made a difference, that my research will prove fruitful, and that I helped the Center fulfill its goals. As a citizen, I am thankful for the Center's existence and hard work. I can say that I would certainly repeat my experience and I urge other undergraduates and law students to get out there and build some democracy!

*Mr. Gabriel J. Gardner  
Spring 2007 Intern  
Elmhurst College*

## Experiencing Public Interest Before Billable Hours

After graduating from law school, but before beginning my career of billable hours, I wanted to experience the legal world from the public interest side. The Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI) fellowship program provided the avenue for me to do just that. After reviewing fifty-plus PILI fellowship opportunities, my interest was piqued by the Center's focus on making communities better by making communities' citizens better. The Center's goals and its past and ongoing efforts immediately spoke to me, personally, as work that I wanted to further. A new resident of the Chicagoland area, I was also happy to have found a place where I could both make a contribution and familiarize myself with the community I was now a part of. I was further impressed by the interview with Terry, and, thankfully, she welcomed me aboard.

Upon my arrival, I was immediately tasked with helping a high school and a college volunteer research the appropriateness of the policies of DuPage municipalities regarding the public comment policies. Some policies were good, some were bad, and some were non-existent. The process was eye-opening—all of us learned a lot about the fragile nature of free speech—and we were able to facilitate positive change.

I also had the pleasure of interacting with various community members as I fielded calls, met Center friends and supporters, and talked with individuals who dropped in for a visit. I worked on current litigation and on various intake projects to assist community members to improve their community or their personal situation through appropriate legal channels.

The largest project that I worked on involved helping launch the Midwest Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Open Meetings Act (OMA) Open Government Project. This ambitious project, graciously funded by the Joyce Foundation, will research the present state of FOIA and OMA legislation in five midwest states; assess its effectiveness and impact on the respective states; and, distill all of the findings into a comprehensive report and model FOIA and OMA documents to act as a benchmark for state legislatures, other public interest groups, and concerned citizens located throughout the midwest. By the time I left, we had made a significant start. While this project is scheduled to take two years, I had a wonderful time contributing to the initial research and development of an attack plan. When completed, I am confident this project is going to make an impact that will reverberate throughout Illinois and the entire Midwest.

As I look out on to the north shore from my office on the 74th floor I will think of the important work of the Center. Fight on Center, Terry, Susie, Eddi, and all Center friends who persevere to make our precious democracy more effective and representative. I look forward to my future contacts with the Center and thank everyone I met and worked with to make my experience fulfilling and thoroughly enjoyable.

*Reid Huefner  
Graduate, Brigham Young Law School  
Kirkland & Ellis PILI Fellow*

## Center Submits Testimony At House Subject

The General Assembly's House of Representative held a subject matter hearing on House Bill 3497 which proposed limits on candidate contributions from an individual, a corporation, a labor organization, and an association to political committees of public office candidates, established political parties, political party committee person candidates, and legislative caucuses.

The subject matter hearing was not a hearing on the general issue of campaign contribution limits. The Center, as well as several other good government organizations submitted written or oral testimony in favor of contribution limits.

The Center's testimony highlighted that a healthy democracy relies on a balance between government accessibility, accountability, and transparency and citizen participation that is effective, informed, and sustained. Illinois' lack of campaign finance regulation directly impacts the health of our democracy. As one of only five states that does not have any limits on direct campaign contributions, the free flow of money into the political system has earned Illinois a long and well documented reputation for political scandals attributable to every level of government. The lack of contribution limits has resulted in the increase in political campaigns, the decrease in the pool of candidates, and a decrease in the effectiveness of small end donors. Ethics reform legislation and increased campaign finance disclosure requirements, while positive steps, have still left a gaping hole.

The Center also highlighted our 2004 procurement project funded by the Joyce Foundation, wherein we conducted an analysis of DuPage County procurement policies and tracked campaign contributions from DuPage County contractors to 71 state and county public officials from DuPage County over a six year period. Our study showed that contributions between \$1,000—\$5,000 increased more than 250%, contributions between \$5,001—\$10,000 increased more than 350%, contributions between \$10,001—\$20,000 increased 230%, and contributions of more than \$20,001 increased 380%. The documentation of the free flow of money begged the question of whose interest is of primary concern to the public official who receives such contributions: the high end contributor who has the capacity to write big checks or the average citizen who can only give a small contribution?

Without contribution limits, citizens' are not on an equal playing field. While democracy has many complexities, adopting campaign contribution limits is a step towards giving the citizenry their voice back. Campaign finance reform is an essential and necessary step to restoring our State's reputation and demonstrating that fairness, honesty, and integrity of our political system are of the utmost importance.

## A Jump Start For Democracy

The Illinois House of Representatives passed House Resolution 25. It appears the General Assembly is unhappy with its own lack of progress in key areas of service to the citizens of Illinois. Education is a primary concern. According the Resolution, Illinois ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the amount of education funding provided by the State. The influence of campaign contributions on public policy is another issue. Monitoring and controlling the income and allocation of campaign contributions is fundamental to the maintenance of an honest and trustworthy legislative process. The Resolution also mentions Illinois' inequitable property assessment system, by which homeowners are subject to undue hardship.

For reasons not entirely known to the Illinois House, these issues are simply not being taken care of via conventional legislative methods. Their solution? Calling a Constitutional Convention, of course! Keeping the best interest of the citizens of Illinois in mind, House Resolution 25 was passed to allow the citizens to decide whether a Constitutional Convention should convene to address the problems the Illinois General Assembly is having trouble addressing now. On its face, this Resolution seems redundant. Shouldn't the legislators be addressing these issues? However, maybe amending the Constitution is what needs to happen. Article XIV, §1(b) of the Illinois Constitution requires Illinois voters to vote on holding a Constitutional Convention at least once every 20 years. The cycle comes around again in time for the November 2008 election. Perhaps voters need to send a strong message to the General Assembly, that if they will not address these issues, the voters will address the issues via a Constitutional Convention. Either way, keep your eyes and ears open to discussion on the issue of a Constitutional Convention. This issue will certainly be vigorously debated as the election nears. After all, when the democratic process is stalled, why not jump-start it with the genuine source of democracy: the voters.

Jesse Traugott  
Summer 2007 Legal Intern

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*Return Service Requested*

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**CITIZEN  
ADVOCACY  
CENTER**

**“It is I”  
The Bruce Roberts Memorial Fund**

Former Citizen Advocacy Center community lawyers, Myrrha Guzman and

Laura Sullivan have worked with the Center to create the "It was I" Memorial Fund in memory of Mr. Bruce Roberts. The purpose of the fund is to provide a stipend to select legal interns who volunteer at the Center.

For many years, Mr. Bruce Roberts was an indispensable and irreplaceable Center volunteer. Having come to the Center initially out of a sense of need to occupy his time, he quickly became an integral part of the organization. To many of us, Mr. Roberts was more than a retired, tattooed English teacher with a fast sports car, who dutifully filed newspaper clippings. Every day that he worked at the Center, Mr. Roberts greeted

employees and volunteers with his contagious smile and enthusiasm. He was proud to be part of the Center and did not miss an opportunity to describe the Center's work and mission to others.

Most of all, Mr. Roberts loved interacting with interns. He shared with them his interesting stories of life, his opinions about the issues of the day, and advice about life in general. He was proud of the interns as they progressed working through their assigned projects and marveled at how interns absorbed, understood, and analyzed the information they had gathered. Many of us were encouraged by Mr. Roberts's love of learning, which he said he did every day he spent at the Center. Mr. Roberts's contributions of love of life, and learning will never be forgotten.

For having taught us all that we must always try to

increase our knowledge and share what we have learned with others, we honor Mr. Roberts by creating the "It was I" Memorial Fund to deserving legal interns.

Most students who intern at the Center do so on a volunteer basis. The Center is one of the few public interest legal organizations where students can get hands-on experience working on public policy issues while helping individuals and community groups resolve issues of public concern.

For more information about the "It was I" Memorial Fund, or to make a contribution, please contact the Center.