

# Everyday Democracy

Citizen Advocacy Center's Newsletter, Second Edition

## INTERNS ISSUE

During the summer, the Center hosts interns who want to work with community lawyers to answer intakes, hold workshops, write brochures, and hold open the doors of government.

Thank you to all intern supporters, including: The Public Interest Law Initiative, University of Michigan Law School, University of Illinois Law School, Brigham Young Law School, Elmhurst College and the Illinois Math and Science Academy.

Thank you to the interns: Mr. Brian Larson, Mr. Josh McLane, Ms. Meena Iyer, Ms. Laura Van Hyfte, and Ms. Krista Wiley.

—The Center

## MY SUMMER WITH THE FIRST AMENDMENT

As a recent law school graduate from BYU and someone who already had a job confirmed with a law firm, I was happy to have the unique opportunity to work in the public interest field prior to beginning my law firm career. I was excited at the prospect of working as a Public Interest Law Initiative Fellow at the Citizen Advocacy Center (Center), so much so that even though my scheduled telephone interview occurred on the day my son was born, I was more than happy to discuss the fellowship. Now as I reflect on my summer experiences, I am so thankful I was able to convince Terry to let me serve there.

My summer began with a research memorandum regarding public comment policies. Specifically, I investigated the expanded First Amendment rights that the public may be entitled to under the Illinois Constitution as

*CAC 2009 Interns:  
Ms. Meena Iyer, Mr.  
Josh McLane, Ms.  
Laura Van Hyfte, Mr.  
Brian Larson, Ms.  
Krista Wiley.*

compared to the United States Constitution. My First Amendment research set the stage for an issue that I continued to focus on even after I finished that assignment. In analyzing First Amendment rights, I reviewed the public comment policies of various local governments (one municipality's public comment policy prohibited "criticism against ... elected officials" [*Village of Island Lake Committee Meeting Agenda, August 6, 2009*]) and had the opportunity to meet with the Superintendent of School District 205 to discuss their policy and practice of prohibiting comments on personnel issues. These experiences provided me with the fantastic opportunity to conduct an in-depth review of First Amendment rights and its application at the grassroots level.

While at the Center, I also worked on several other projects, including assisting several individuals in obtaining documents from various governmental organizations through the Freedom of Information Act. My favorite experiences involved the brown bag lunches hosted by the Center. The Center provided unique opportunities for the interns to talk with dynamic people such as former Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan and the Center's founder, Theresa Amato. Meeting Theresa was really a neat experience. Hearing her talk about the Center's roots and its evolution gave me a greater appreciation of community lawyering work. The Center also hosted brown bag lunches where summer interns facilitated

*Josh McLane, continued on page two*



*Josh McLane, continued from page one*

community programs on current events for the public. These were great learning experiences in preparing, presenting, and answering public questions on a current topic. The public speaking experience was fantastic. I facilitated a brown bag lunch titled: *Where's the Beef or Trim the Fat?* The program was about the State budget crisis and possible solutions. At our brown bag lunch, another intern and I facilitated a mock General Assembly convening with nearly twenty people. Our goal was to pass a balanced budget. We engaged in furtive debates about increasing taxes and cutting government salaries, compensation and State services.

Another great lesson came when I monitored an Illinois State Toll Highway Authority (ISTHA) board meeting with Ryne Bex. It was remarkable to see that, in a matter of about *thirty* seconds, the ISTHA Board spent three-quarters of a *billion* dollars. It was a stark reminder of how important it is for this type of monitoring to be practiced by the Center.

Thanks again to everyone at the Center for such a wonderful summer. I am grateful for the relationships I have developed and look forward to working with the Center again.

*Mr. Josh McLane  
PILI Fellow  
Brigham Young Law School*



Top row: Brian Larson, Josh McLane, Benson McLane, Ryne Bex. Bottom row: Terry Pastika, Laura Van Hyfte, Krista Wiley, Maryam Judar.

## HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

I decided to apply for a summer internship at the Citizen Advocacy Center (Center) because, as a prospective law school student, I was curious about what public interest law entailed. Terry informed me during my interview that interns are expected to actually be involved in the work of the Center. This involved researching policy issues and intake questions, monitoring government meetings and doing public speaking. I was not convinced that I would have the opportunity to participate in activities that were “hands-on” because, after all, it was only an internship.

Upon completing my first day I discovered that Terry was not kidding. I was actually going to be contributing to the completion of projects and addressing issues in the community. The first project involved analyzing racial profiling statistics gathered by police departments across DuPage County and focused on consent searches. I translated the statistics into visual graphs and compared our statistical findings of racial profiling to minority populations of the various municipalities. I then gave a presentation of our analysis at an Immigrant Solidarity DuPage meeting. Immigrant Solidarity DuPage shared our analysis with members of the press, who ran local and national stories on racial profiling in DuPage County. The second project involved gathering school district handbooks and policies to analyze school disciplinary policies related to student *off-campus Internet usage*. My research showed that very few schools actually had policies that specifically addressed off-campus conduct. As a follow-up to my research project, I created a middle school and high school lesson plan where students are required to collect school policies on disciplinary matters, analyze the policies, suggest reforms, and present recommendations to their school board. Over the course of my internship, my research skills were put to the test and I was more than happy to rise to the challenge. I could tell that the information provided by the Center to citizen groups made them feel empowered to fight injustices in their communities. I appreciated the rare chance to spend my summer doing work that proved to be rewarding.

In addition to developing the ability to examine the concerns of members of the community, I learned that public interest lawyers take on the numerous responsibilities that accompany running a grassroots organization. It was not uncommon to see the Center’s community lawyers answering the phones, taking out the trash, and vacuuming. I was surprised to see this because I felt as though, as an intern, these jobs would be handed to me.

As a result of my summer internship I gained an understanding of what it means to be a community lawyer and also a great respect for the work that is done at the Center.

*Ms. Krista Wiley  
College Intern  
Junior, Elmhurst College*

## A True Grassroots Experience

My second day with the CAC involved a round trip eight hour drive to Springfield, IL in a green pickup truck, without air conditioning, dressed in a wool suit. It was perfect, "true grassroots." I loved every minute.

While in Springfield we attended a civic education press conference, watched the General Assembly in action, and observed a policy strategy meeting. On our return trip, we learned that the Freedom of Information Act legislation that the Center had been working on was spontaneously introduced for a vote by members of the House. By the time we drove into the Chicagoland area, the bill had passed through the full General Assembly. That day set the stage for the rest of my internship.

Over 11 weeks I was very fortunate to receive a healthy load of legal writing and research projects, but also many community outreach opportunities I never envisioned for my first legal internship. Before working for the CAC, I had some exposure to engaging in local government through the Michigan Student Assembly (MSA), where I was the MSA Liaison to the Ann Arbor City Council, between my sophomore and junior year. With the CAC, however, I was afforded opportunities to co-facilitate a presentation on consent searches in a bilingual forum and co-present a brown bag lunch on illegal search and seizures in high schools. I also had the incredible opportunity to participate in an international exchange hosted by the CAC. Advocates for transparent elections in Armenia specifically visited the CAC to learn more about how it promotes good government, monitors government agencies, and mobilizes volunteers.

One of the largest and most challenging projects I worked on was researching whether a road in a municipality required traffic calming. This involved researching the Illinois Municipal Code, the municipality's Village Code, the zoning and planning ordinances in effect and relevant case law. After my research was complete and my memo was finalized, a community lawyer and I contacted the citizen who called the CAC for assistance and I had the opportunity to explain my research. This experience was valuable because I gained practical skills and realized how the CAC's work impacts people's lives.

At the end of my first year of law school I was a little weary about jumping into a summer internship. For those unaware of what the first year of law school entails, imagine a room of books, a desk, a chair, and yourself. I am very grateful to say this internship has helped me remember why I wanted to go to law school. While the Illinois Pension Code and the Illinois Vehicle Code may not be my life forte, or a field I want to revisit in the near future, researching these issues was exciting and helped me better understand how public policy, no matter the size, affects people's lives.

I am incredibly excited to begin my second year with the new skills and experiences the CAC has given me.

*Ms. Laura A. Van Hyfte  
1L, Legal Intern  
University of Michigan Law School*

## A VALUED MEMBER OF THE TEAM

Summer had *finally* come to fruition, highly anticipated as it always is. I realized, with relief, that I could devote the next ten weeks not only catching up on all the TV I neglected over the last semester, but also to focusing on the activities I was truly passionate about. No longer did I have an obligation to spend 4 plus hours each week stuck in a Calculus class, contemplating the abolishment of such cruel and unusual punishment.

Summers always provided ample time to completely immerse myself in activities I actually cared about. Law had always been an interest of mine, thus, I made a conscious decision to pursue it. In looking for a summer internship, I discovered the Center. When I began my internship at the end June, I did not know what to expect but soon realized that this would be unlike any other interning opportunity I had ever experienced. I started my first day walking into an office filled with lawyers, law students and a college student. The fact that I was still a high school student never fazed anyone. I was given the same amount of respect as my counterparts who were much older than I. Not once was I ever talked down to, or given a smaller workload. Though this detail seems rather superfluous, it captures the essence of what I did this summer for the Center.

As a result of this trust, I was not sentenced to completing menial tasks. From the start, I was assigned projects researching municipal codes of Chicago suburbs. My task was to search for "niceness" laws. I looked for how municipalities across Chicagoland would treat a resident who attended public meetings and gave negative, harsh, public comments and the subsequent penalties. I learned how to research municipal codes and public body agendas and compiled several documents used by Center community lawyers. The fact that Maryam and Terry used many of the documents that I compiled in their daily work filled me with a sense of purpose and let me know that I had something valuable to contribute.

The best part about interning was that everyone was extremely courteous of my busy schedule. When I was available I stopped by for a couple of hours and worked on whatever projects I was given, I felt like a valued member of the team. The payoff was immense. I would recommend the Center to even the busiest person. No matter how long that individual spends there each day, he/she would still walk away knowing that the Center provided an enjoyable and fulfilling summer experience.

*Ms. Meena Iyer  
Junior, High School Intern  
Illinois Math and Science Academy*

182 N. York St.,  
Elmhurst, IL 60126  
www.citizenadvocacycenter.org  
630-833-4080

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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, please feel free to contact or visit us.

***Return Service Requested***

## Interning in My Own Backyard

The primary reason I entered law school was because of the desire to make a societal difference. Having experience engaging with government from my undergraduate years and interning with state government, I was eager to turn that knowledge around and look at democratic obstacles from the outside. What I found was both startling and refreshing. I saw citizen groups stymied by local politicians who have visions of grandeur as well as citizens who were able to work with their local representatives for the betterment of their communities. Most importantly, I learned that as a democracy it is important to keep our elected officials accountable and responsive.

This summer I was heavily involved in helping citizens resolve localized problems that were very basic in nature. My summer experiences ranged from writing letters to the editor that got published across the State, helping CAC community lawyers write an amicus brief, analyzing high school social studies curriculum across DuPage County, gathering government contract disclosure policies, and helping a group address an irresponsive municipal government that seemed to be the suburban equivalent of a corrupt metropolis. I also had the opportunity to immerse myself in Illinois finances for the purpose of organizing and facilitating a brown bag lunch. Another intern and I, with

the input of interested community members from all over the western suburbs, undertook the difficult task of balancing the Illinois budget. Over the course of the program, our group evaluated more than 50 line items within the State budget to determine where government money was being spent unwisely or where new revenue sources could be located.

Working with the CAC gave me the opportunity to truly get more involved with my community. With citizen groups not able to get sufficient coverage from the press, or serious consideration from public officials, I became an activist to help people have their voice heard rather than just another newspaper reader. The CAC makes you care about the community, question policy, and dig for the truth. The CAC taught me that it's difficult out in the trenches of the active citizenry, but also that it is possible to affect the change we need to increase democracy.

*Mr. Brian Larson  
1L, Legal Intern  
University of Illinois College of Law*