

BUILDING DEMOCRACY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Citizen Advocacy Center (CAC) is an award winning, free, non-profit, non-partisan, community-based legal and educational organization founded in 1994.

Through community lawyering, the CAC works to build democracy by strengthening the citizenry's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

- ❖ **Public Education and Training** in civic skills and the various laws that protect and enable citizen access to government decision-making for the purpose of increasing the public's capacity and desire to participate in community affairs;
- ❖ **Public Resources** to build citizen confidence and knowledge to take action on self-identified issues of public significance;
- ❖ **Monitoring Government** agencies to ensure accountability and taking action to deter government officials from acting contrary to the public interest; and
- ❖ **Advocacy and Litigation** to sustain access to justice.

PUBLIC EDUCATION & TRAINING

Community Lawyer Democracy Workshops

Audiences:

General Public	Journalists
Educators	Public Officials

Examples of Workshops Topics:

- ❖ Civic Skills & Community Organizing 101
- ❖ Freedom of Information Act
- ❖ Open Meetings Act
- ❖ Local & State Legislative Processes
- ❖ Tax Increment Financing
- ❖ Home Rule
- ❖ Citizen Initiative Ballot Access
- ❖ Local Zoning Rules and Citizen Engagement Redistricting 101

Free Educational Brochures

The CAC has more than 30 brochures that explain the various laws in non-legalese.

Brochure topics, in addition to the above issues, include:

- ❖ Free Speech and Public Comment
- ❖ Non-Profit Incorporation: 501(c)(3) & 501(c)(4)
- ❖ Zoning Rules of Procedure
- ❖ Diagnostic Democracy
- ❖ Local Records Act
- ❖ Procurement 101
- ❖ Whistleblower Laws
- ❖ Ethics Ordinances
- ❖ Property Assessment Appeals in DuPage County

Internships & Volunteer Opportunities

Internships: Interns are supervised by community lawyers and investigate citizen concerns, advance public policy projects, create educational brochures, facilitate forums, monitor government meetings, and more. The CAC accepts interns from:

High school	College	Law School
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Volunteers: Volunteers are crucial to the CAC's mission as they work on a variety of substantive projects under the direction of a community lawyer. Regardless of age or capability, volunteers work on projects that contribute to building democracy.

PUBLIC RESOURCES

Community Lawyering Services

- ❖ **Answering public inquiries** on policies and procedures at various government levels. CAC lawyers answer questions on any of the brochure topics, help file FOIA requests, obtain non-profit status, put initiatives on the ballot, and more;
- ❖ **Helping community groups organize campaigns** to address local public policy issues. Assistance includes legal research, media training, coalition building, First Amendment training, and more;
- ❖ **Guest Speaking** on brochure topics and additional issues; and
- ❖ **Publishing Law Articles and & Policy Studies** on issues impacting the public. Articles inform legislators about barriers to public engagement and possible reforms.

Youth Civic Education Program

CAC's youth civic program for middle, high school and college students and educators provide hands-on resources to teach about democracy, government, and citizen engagement:

- ❖ Civic education lesson plan library;
- ❖ In-service training seminars;
- ❖ Community lawyer guest speakers & intriguing Constitution Week speakers;
- ❖ Organizing assistance to students who are addressing an issue of public concern; and
- ❖ Assistance in creating service learning programs that promote civic engagement.

Everyday Democracy Newsletter features current CAC issues, activities, programs, and citizen-initiated community issues.

Meeting Place for community and start-up groups.

MONITORING GOVERNMENT

The CAC holds open the doors of government by monitoring government meetings, upholding the rights of the citizenry at government meetings, analyzing policies, and making reform recommendations that increase accountability, transparency and accessibility. We also take action to remove anti-democratic policies and procedures.

The following are examples of CAC activity:

- ❖ Defending individuals' rights to speak at government meetings;
- ❖ Defending individuals' right to express discontent at government meetings;
- ❖ Forcing government bodies to properly notice public meetings;
- ❖ Forcing government bodies to adhere to standards set in state law; and
- ❖ Helping citizens navigate the red tape of government decision-making to advocate for various policies.

PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY & LITIGATION

The CAC advocates, and as a last resort litigates, to strengthen democracy at the local and state level.

Examples of Advocacy Areas:

Freedom of Information Act	Ethics
Open Meetings Act	Procurement
Campaign Finance	Election Code
Tax Increment Financing	Redistricting
Civic Education	

Coalition Organizing:

- ❖ The CAC is a leader at the state and local level in bringing together non-profits to enhance collective action on the above policy areas and more

Litigation Examples:

- ❖ Enforcement of state Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Act statute;
- ❖ Enforcement of the First Amendment; and
- ❖ Landmark fair-housing litigation.

Citizen Advocacy Center

- ❖ **A 501 (c)(3), award-winning non-profit, non-partisan organization.**
- ❖ **A free community-based legal organization staffed by community lawyers.**

The Citizen Advocacy Center:

- ❖ **Builds democracy by helping citizens organize community campaigns to address self-identified issues of public concern.**
- ❖ **Provides Education and Training:**
 - **Democracy Workshops;**
 - **Educational Brochures;**
 - **Community lawyer guest speakers to schools, community groups, and institutions; and**
 - **Student internships and volunteer opportunities.**
- ❖ **Provides Resources:**
 - **Answers questions regarding issues of public concern;**
 - **Legal and technical assistance to start-up community groups;**
 - **A hands-on youth civic education program; and**
 - **Discussion forums that explore current public policy issues.**
- ❖ **Monitors local governments for abuse of power and takes action to dismantle anti-democratic policies.**
- ❖ **Advocates for systemic reform of anti-democratic policies and procedures.**
- ❖ **As a last resort, litigates to remove illegal and systemic undemocratic protocols.**

The Citizen Advocacy Center is financially supported by private foundations and individual contributions. We do not accept government or corporate funding. All contributions are tax deductible. Please give if you can.



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