

**For Immediate Release
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**LOCAL CITIZENS RECEIVE CITIZEN INITIATIVE AWARD FROM
CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND
BEING CATALYSTS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION**

ELMHURST – The Citizen Advocacy Center (CAC) will recognize its 2017 Citizen Initiative Award recipients on December 6. Since 1997 CAC has recognized local community activists and community groups who are catalysts for democratic participation and use civic, legal, and community organizing tools to advocate for a self-identified issue of public concern. “Recipients of the Citizen Initiative Awards have identified an issue of public concern and have taken it upon themselves to organize, advocate, and make a difference in their communities. They care about their communities and are engaged. The award recognizes the essential and unique role these individuals play in a participatory democracy. Because of their activism, democracy thrives, even in the face of adversity,” said Maryam Judar, CAC’s Executive Director.

The presentation starts at 6:30 p.m. on December 6, 2017 at the Citizen Advocacy Center, 182 N. York St. in Elmhurst. It is open to the public and free of charge with a \$10 suggested donation. Reservations are not required but are helpful! Those interested can call CAC at 630-833-4080 or email CAC@CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org to reserve a space.

The 2017 Citizen Initiative Award recipients are:

The Virgil Family, Elmhurst, for community organizing, advocacy on sustainability, and pursuing accountability and transparency in government decision-making.

The Virgil family built a temporary “hoop house” over their home garden to extend the growing season. The City of Elmhurst ordered the hoop house removed after receiving a complaint, even though the city explicitly allowed the hoop house the previous winter. The Virgil Family contacted CAC, which educated them on community organizing and government decision-making. A simple garden issue evolved into a community-wide issue on food sustainability, and government accountability and transparency. The Virgil family organized dozens of neighbors and local activists to attend City Council and committee meetings; used social media and garnered local and regional press coverage; and lobbied public officials to advance policy change. The Virgil family is also pursuing justice before a state court, questioning the applicability of the city’s ordinance and the appropriateness of various actions related to decision-making.

Jimmy Lynch, Lombard, for using the First Amendment to organize a youth march to support students impacted by DACA policy changes.

Mr. Jimmy Lynch is a politically engaged senior at Glenbard East High School. Mr. Lynch organized a march to support students affected by the federal government abandoning its policy on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The students consulted CAC

about local ordinances for marches and assemblies, whether they needed to seek a permit from the municipality, and associated First Amendment issues. A CAC community lawyer served as a legal observer at the march. Nearly 50 students participated in a peaceful, student-led march near Glenbard East, which garnered local media attention.

Mike Murray, Bloomingdale Township, for using the power of binding referendum to help those with mental health issues.

Mr. Mike Murray believes in providing mental health services to those in need and that township government can play a crucial role in delivering services. Mr. Murray spoke with CAC about how to place a binding citizen-initiated referendum on the ballot to establish a "708" Mental Health Board in Bloomingdale Township. CAC helped Mr. Murray navigate ballot-access laws and application of the Community Mental Health Act. Mr. Murray drafted a petition, organized a team of volunteers to collect more than 1500 signatures and submitted the petition. Once the question was placed on the ballot, Mr. Murray educated voters throughout the township in support of the referendum. Voters narrowly approved the measure. As a result of Mr. Murray's efforts, Bloomingdale Township formed a mental health board that will plan and coordinate mental health care services for township residents.

Families for Fremont, Elmhurst, for sustained civic engagement and advocacy.

Residents of East Fremont Avenue oppose the more than 25,000 square foot expansion of a nursing home onto two residential lots on the street, next to and across from single-family homes. Families for Fremont contacted CAC for assistance in understanding the relevant zoning codes, navigating the zoning process, and effectively advocating for their neighborhood before elected and appointed city officials. The neighbors convinced both the Zoning and Planning Commission and the Development, Planning, and Zoning Committee that the expansion did not meet Elmhurst's municipal code standards. However, the Committee sent the case back for another hearing after the nursing home threatened to sue Elmhurst. The residents redoubled their efforts for the latest hearing, over one year after the process began, and await another decision from the Zoning and Planning Commission.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a 501(c) (3), non-profit, non-partisan, community-based legal organization with a mission to build democracy for the 21st century. Recognition by CAC is not in any way an endorsement of any individual who is or may become a candidate for public office. Founded in 1994, CAC strengthens the citizenry's capacities, institutions, and resources for self-governance. For more information about CAC or to make a contribution, visit us at www.CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org.

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