



BUILDING DEMOCRACY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

INTERN EDITION • FALL 2016



Summer Intern Night 2016: The Citizen Advocacy Center recognized its summer interns at its annual Democracy Night, held on July 12, at CAC in Elmhurst. Front row from left: intern Lyndsey Franklin, intern Katie Rawls, intern Nandini Pillai. Back row from left: community lawyer Ben Silver, intern Andrea Augustinas, executive director/community lawyer Maryam Judar.

Summer at CAC is the place to be if you are a high school, college, or law student looking for hands-on experience in learning the law and developing the civic and community organizing tools that build democracy and impact government decision-making.

Interns work under the supervision of CAC's community lawyers. They answer community intake questions, investigate complaints of anti-democratic activity, conduct policy research and analysis, participate in litigation, and more.

In the pages that follow, interns share their thoughts about CAC, the projects they worked on, and what they learned from the experience. Thank you to our 2016 summer interns, their academic institutions, and the Public Interest Law Initiative.

Sincerely,

CAC Staff and Board of Directors

When I heard about the Citizen Advocacy Center, I knew it was the perfect opportunity for me to see the influence that just a few caring and active individuals can have in local government. I wanted to fully understand how to become civically involved, observe the important changes that can be made by citizen participation, and begin to advocate for issues of public importance. I wanted to see what can be done to keep government in check.

A fascinating issue regarding bond refinancing and lack of government transparency developed in my hometown of Lisle. I had the



"The controversy truly sparked my desire to participate in holding government accountable."

LYNDESEY FRANKLIN, Rising Sophomore
University of Southern California

opportunity to attend multiple board of trustees meetings, sign a petition, and learn in-depth about the issue. The controversy truly sparked my desire to participate in holding government accountable, and I will continue to stay involved in local government.

Another project I worked on involved a school district that was cited

by the Illinois State Board of Education for not maintaining a sufficient English Language Learners (ELL) program for its students. An individual concerned about how this insufficiency affects students' academic progress requested that we help her compile information on the school district's conduct.

See **FRANKLIN** continued on page 2

I drafted Freedom of Information Act requests, researched the school's bilingual education program, and examined national and state laws regarding English-language proficiency and bilingual instruction. Later, I attended a meeting with a group of concerned parents dealing with similar ELL program deficiencies in another school district.

One of my major projects was to examine municipalities in five different Illinois counties and ensure that they are allowing the public to give comment at their open government meetings. Poring through municipal codes and websites, I also endeavored to determine whether each municipality had recorded the rules and regulations for giving public comment in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. I then evaluated whether

recorded rules contained unconstitutional restrictions. In addition to conducting research online, I communicated with a few dozen municipalities by phone that did not have any rules available via web access. At the conclusion of my research, I compiled an analysis of my findings.

My time at CAC has been a rewarding experience. I developed stronger research skills and deepened my understanding of law. I have been utterly inspired by the dedication of local citizens to fight for their rights, to hold their representatives accountable, and to be active participants in government processes. It has been an absolute honor to hear their stories and be of service. From these dedicated individuals and from the incredible work of CAC, I have learned to become a better citizen.

“Do what you can with what you have where you are”
-Theodore Roosevelt

Your donations fund activities such as our summer internship program and our free educational forums.

Your support is greatly appreciated!



“One common reason people reach out to CAC is because governments take actions that discourage participation in the democratic process.”

KATIE RAWLS, Rising 2L
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

I didn't know what the Citizen Advocacy Center's tagline "building democracy" really means until I spent my summer at the center doing just that. Now I understand how public participation is necessary to keep our governments accountable, transparent, and focused on serving the people.

Right out of the gate, I began poring over Illinois law to locate all the ways in which citizens can directly legislate. I happily found that Illinois law provides hundreds of provisions for citizen-initiated binding referenda. Unfortunately, many of these statutes are limited to specific circumstances that restrict their applicability.

My research will hopefully lay the foundation for a helpful tool for the public, as awareness of these avenues to direct democracy could yield important results.

This summer I learned how citizens can keep government accountable. For example, in Forest Park, a citizen brought to CAC's attention a barrier to public participation. The village board and mayor instituted an onerous application form for residents interested in serving on voluntary boards and commissions. The form asks if the applicant has ever done anything that could embarrass the mayor, and requires disclosure of any past or pending lawsuits, arrests,

and convictions. It requests authorization for the public body to obtain the potential volunteer's credit report too! I gave public comment at a village board meeting, wrote a published letter to the editor of the Forest Park Review, and spoke with other community members about the issue. The residents of Forest Park will continue to monitor the situation and advocate for the implementation of a more reasonable application to encourage participation and volunteerism.

I also spent a lot of time this summer researching issues related to the Open Meetings Act. I researched and wrote multiple Requests for Review to the Attorney General's Office for possible noncompliance issues. Questions about whether proper exemptions were taken by public bodies to meet in closed session and notice issues arose repeatedly. Timely notice provision posed another frequent issue.

See **RAWLS** continued on page 3

Without advance notice and advance agendas, the public is potentially denied the opportunity to attend or reflect on whether to attend a meeting, and perhaps make a public comment. The Request for Review process also reminds public bodies that the citizenry is monitoring their behavior.

Upon reflection, I recognize that this summer we have been able to “build democracy.” One common reason people reach out to CAC is because governments take actions that discourage participation in the democratic process. CAC’s assistance enhances participation, affecting many communities throughout northeastern Illinois.

On a personal level, being an intern at CAC has opened my eyes to the ways that I can engage in my community and with local government. Furthermore, my time here has encouraged me to urge others to pay attention to local government actions and participate. Professionally, I’ve gained the experience of diving into the intricacies of law, including in old municipal codes on the dusty shelves of a law library. CAC has helped me to grow as a legal writer, reiterating the skills I learned in my first year of law school but in real world applications. I look forward to carrying all these lessons with me as I further develop as an attorney and an engaged citizen.

Did you know?
**On National Voter
Registration Day, Tuesday
September 27, CAC
helped register students,
staff, and faculty at the
College of DuPage
campus in Glen Ellyn at
the Student Resource
Center/Student Services
Center.**

Access issues have long been important to me, including access to education, healthcare, and justice. This summer I asked myself, why should people who do not enjoy positions of power in our political system be barred from participating in government? Fortunately, being an intern at the Citizen Advocacy Center gave me a powerful perspective on citizen-led solutions to community problems. By rooting its mission in the idea of active democracy — for everyone, everywhere — CAC is able to help people on a wide variety of issues, and provide resources to citizens who might otherwise have no means to speak up.

My CAC internship was incredibly educational. My goal for this internship was to find out what public interest law can look like outside of a courtroom. Law school pushes the notion of “traditional lawyering,” but this summer I learned that community lawyering and public policy advocacy forced me to think creatively about how to solve problems.

During my summer at CAC, I worked on many different projects.



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to solve problems.”***

ANDREA AUGUSTINAS, Rising 2L
Chicago-Kent College of Law

I completed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for records, and researched the limits of FOIA and the types of material the public can legally access. I investigated Illinois’ legislative measures designed to prevent Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP suits), and those designed to protect whistleblowers at their jobs. I examined the objection process against candidates for office across several Midwestern states, as well as how elections are funded here in Illinois. I attended events organized by groups looking to increase transparency and fairness in government. Most importantly, I engaged on a regular basis with citizens who truly wanted better

for themselves and for their communities.

Working with municipal laws and governing bodies was also new for me. Having grown up in Illinois, I’d always known that each village and town has its own quirks and rules, but working at CAC made that clearer than ever. Delving into the minutiae of local procedures proved challenging, and assisting community members to get information that informs their participation was a difficult process at times. Acting to enhance citizen engagement at the Citizen Advocacy Center gave me the opportunity to see first-hand just how many people really are fighting, every day, to make things better.

The Citizen Advocacy Center has established itself as a kind of first stop on the way to creating real change. People come here with questions, and CAC works to find the answers. But the best thing about the Citizen Advocacy Center is that the goal isn’t to play the traditional lawyer role of “we’ll take it from here;” it’s to give citizens the tools they need to advocate for themselves and build a better future.



“At CAC I saw an alternative to the commonplace assumption

that litigation is the only solution.”

NANDINI PILLAI, Rising 2L
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

When I applied to the Citizen Advocacy Center, I didn’t realize that “spreading democracy” was an apt description of what happens at the center. Although I knew that education and advocacy were two large pillars of the organization’s work, I didn’t know how the impact of CAC on citizens and communities extends beyond the activities at the office. CAC is dedicated to empowering citizens to navigate government while using civic skills to make a difference. My internship has shown me how to make the legal system work for the common citizen who lacks a legal background. This summer, I’ve researched laws and policies affecting the local, regional, and state levels. I’ve learned more about the intersection of the law and policy, while dealing with issues affecting the everyday lives of people throughout Illinois.

During my time at the Citizen Advocacy Center, my primary policy project focused on economic

development corporations (EDCs) and transparency. Many states are turning to private, nonprofit EDCs to attract business and grow their economies, rather than to a government agency. EDCs in Illinois are not subject to public record requests or open meeting laws because they are private organizations, yet they frequently receive tax dollars to function. A new statewide EDC, the Illinois Business and Economic Development Corporation (ILBEDC), was incorporated in January of 2016 and isn’t currently subject to Illinois sunshine laws. I researched whether and how other states subjected their state or local EDCs to their respective sunshine laws to help identify best practices from the citizen perspective. As I researched state legislation across the U.S., I learned about the epidemic of state EDCs that misuse taxpayer money, and the need for these entities to be accountable to the public.

Another project I worked on this summer focused on English Language Learners (ELL) and Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) compliance in a school district in Cicero. A group of citizens from Cicero approached CAC with concerns that the children’s needs in their school district weren’t being met. According to the 2015 School District Report Card, Cicero School District 99 had an enrollment of 12,857 students, 92.1% of which identified as being Hispanic, 94.2% identify as low-income, and 51.9% identify as English Learners. In 2013, the Illinois School Board of

Education conducted a compliance review and found that Cicero School District 99 was out of compliance in seven different areas of ELL/TBE requirements. I identified possible public records that could help illuminate whether the school district implemented its ensuing compliance plan. This project really brought out my passion, because children in a low-income, high minority area were affected, and would be affected throughout their educational experience. I feel that my work was of significance in enabling the community group to better address the needs of children in the community.

In addition to these assignments, I drafted and submitted FOIA requests to various public bodies, drafted a Request for Review to the Office of the Attorney General’s Public Access Counselor regarding the release of a 911 call, and researched various legal questions throughout the summer. At CAC I saw alternatives to the commonplace assumption that litigation is the only solution. I attended meetings that described the implications of policy in the arenas of campaign finance, water contamination, and ELL/TBE programs. I really enjoyed my time at CAC, because I felt that the rewards were great: every time I interacted with the public or saw walk-ins, I realized that I was helping them to impact their community. My passion for public service has been augmented, and I hope to carry the mission of CAC through every day of my legal career.

2016 Citizen Initiative Awards

On Wednesday, December 7th, CAC will recognize its 2016 Citizen Initiative Award recipients. CAC awards local community activists who are catalysts for democratic participation while using civic, legal, and community organizing tools to advocate for an issue of public concern.

When: Wednesday, December 7, 2016, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Where: Citizen Advocacy Center, 182 N. York St., Elmhurst

RSVP: 630-833-4080 or cac@citizenadvocacycenter.org

- Event is free and open to the public. Suggested donation: \$10.00.
- Please see more details at <http://www.CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org/events>

Upcoming Events

Citizen Advocacy Center Critical Conversations:

❖ **The History and Current Context of Challenges for Latinos in Public Education:**

What is bilingual education, and what values does it serve? How has current bilingual education practice been influenced by the struggles against segregation and anti-immigrant racism? Whether you were raised in a household in which a language other than English was spoken none, some, or all of the time, this program and discussion will inform you about the notion of uniformity of language in the modern nation-state and the evolution of bilingual education in the United States set against a backdrop of history, law and legal traditions, and the contemporary experiences of attendees, with a focus on Latinos/as.

- ✓ **When:** October 5, 2016 at 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- ✓ **Where:** Elmhurst Public Library* 125 S. Prospect Ave. Elmhurst, IL Meeting Room A

❖ **Public Education Funding, Diversity, and Achievement:**

What accounts for race- and class-based achievement gaps? Education's efficacy among racial groups and between classes has been viewed through the lens of racial bias testing, discrimination or segregation in schools and classrooms, socioeconomic disparities of families and communities, differences in family interactions, teachers' perceptions and treatment of students, overall school quality, and more. Ultimately, regardless of which education policy is implemented, the resources needed to implement policy require funding. How do communities hold their states and school districts accountable to ensure that funding is used efficiently and effectively? During this program and discussion, attendees will explore these questions against a backdrop of how some state legislatures have made strides to address these issues.

- ✓ **When:** October 19, 2016 at 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- ✓ **Where:** Elmhurst Public Library* 125 S. Prospect Ave. Elmhurst, IL Meeting Room A

❖ **Big Brother, the Law and You:**

What is the role that race and ethnicity play in determining the reasonableness of searches and seizures under Fourth Amendment jurisprudence, and what should that role be? How does law create privacy inequities between races and classes in the U.S.? During this program and discussion, Supreme Court interpretations of the Fourth Amendment guarantee against unreasonable searches and seizures by government -- including the exclusionary rule, third party doctrine, physical trespass doctrine, and reasonableness jurisprudence -- are reviewed with a focus on how Fourth Amendment jurisprudence appears "race-neutral" but has profound racialized social consequences.

- ✓ **When:** November 2, 2016 at 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- ✓ **Where:** Elmhurst Public Library* 125 S. Prospect Ave. Elmhurst, IL Meeting Room A

❖ **Democracy, Diversity, and Third Party Candidates:**

Independents are no longer predominantly white -- according to one academic report, of self-identified independents, more than 40% are non-white. Voters who call themselves independent describe a wide variety of political positions. Why do voters fail to develop ties to either major party? How do we account for non-partisanship among minority voters? How have third parties historically organized around racial issues? In this program and discussion, attendees will examine the role of third-parties in expressing dissent and advancing social agendas.

- ✓ **When:** November 16, 2016 at 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- ✓ **Where:** Elmhurst Public Library* 125 S. Prospect Ave. Elmhurst, IL Meeting Room A

- ✓ All events are free and open to the public.
- ✓ All the above forums have been made possible by a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council.
- ✓ Please see full details and RSVP at: <http://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org/events.html>

*Please note this program is not an Elmhurst Public Library activity.



Citizen Advocacy Center
182 N York St
Elmhurst, IL 60126

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ABOUT US

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a nonprofit, nonpartisan community legal organization and 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to building democracy for the 21st century by strengthening the citizenry's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance.

CONTACT US

Phone: 630-833-4080

Web: www.CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org

Email: CAC@CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org

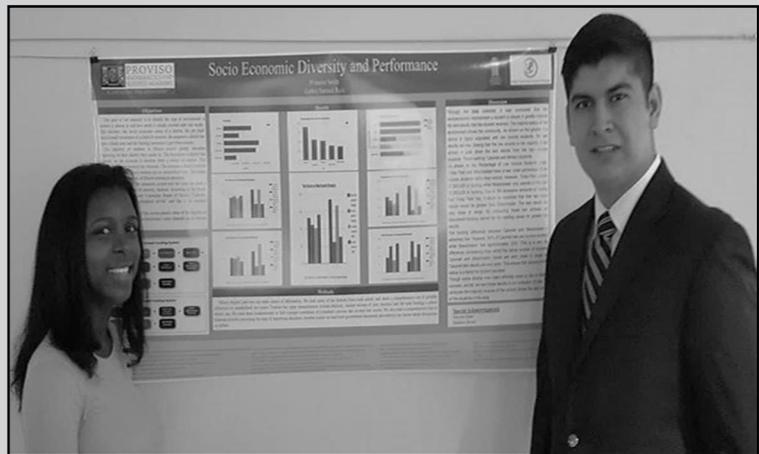
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Special Feature: Meet CAC's PMSA Interns

Each year the Citizen Advocacy Center mentors students from Proviso Math & Science Academy who are interested in pursuing social justice projects. This year CAC mentored Princess Smith and Carlos Ruiz on their social justice project examining the relationship between school funding, socioeconomic diversity, and academic performance. They investigated whether the type of academic environment a student is placed in contributes to performance on state test results. They looked at socioeconomic status of school districts, per-pupil instructional investment,



Princess Smith & Carlos Ruiz with their presentation poster.

district expenses during the fiscal year, and funding sources. Ms. Smith and Mr. Ruiz concluded that socioeconomic status of a student is the most significant predictor of academic achievement, rather than race or funding amounts.