FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 2, 2015

Contact: Maryam Judar
Executive Director/Community Lawyer
Citizen Advocacy Center (630) 833-4080

ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASSES BILL REQUIRING CIVIC EDUCATION AS A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT; HEADS TO THE GOVERNOR

ELMHURST – On May 30, House Bill 4025, a bill mandating civic education in Illinois as a high school requirement has passed through the General Assembly and now heads to the Governor. Illinois is currently one of only 10 states in the nation that does not require civic education. At a time when bipartisan divisions run deep in the General Assembly, the civic education bill sponsored by Representative Conroy (D-Villa Park) in the House and Senator Cullerton (D-Villa Park) in the Senate, passed with strong bipartisan support. In addition, the Citizen Advocacy Center played a major role in the strong coalition effort that successfully generated public awareness for how required civic education could change the civic landscape in Illinois.

“Our state needs well-prepared students who have the ability to tackle tough issues impacting their communities and Illinois. A semester of civics will provide students with the knowledge of how government works and how to impact government decision-making on issues they care about,” said Maryam Judar, executive director of the Citizen Advocacy Center.

The legislation is supported by funding through a public-private partnership led by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation to provide high-quality, school-based civic learning opportunities for all students in Illinois. Over three million dollars have been pledged over the next three years to provide history teachers with professional development in civic education.

HB 4025 is based on recommendations of the General Assembly’s Task Force on Civic Education, of which Ms. Judar was an appointed member. In 2014, the Task Force recommended that Illinois require a stand-alone civic education course in high school after analyzing the current state of civic education in Illinois; civic education laws in other jurisdictions with mandated civic education; and best practices in civic education in other jurisdictions. The primary goal of requiring civic education is to increase civic literacy by increasing the capacity of youth to learn the knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to become civically informed and engaged.

Hundreds of people testified in favor of civic education when the Task Force held multiple public hearings throughout Illinois. Additional Task Force recommendations include: revision of Illinois Social Studies Standards, which is currently underway; a required civic service learning project in middle and high school; access to professional development aligned to best practices; and involvement by students in the election process.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a non-profit, non-partisan community-based legal nonprofit dedicated to building democracy in the 21st century by strengthening the citizenry’s capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance. Visit www.CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org for more information.

###