



COLLABORATION FOR JUSTICE

Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice and the Chicago Council of Lawyers

October 2012

Introduction

Chicago Appleseed is a social justice organization that uses in-depth research of community problems to develop and advocate for practical solutions. Chicago Council of Lawyers is a public interest lawyer organization which advocates for a fair and effective administration of justice. Together, the two organizations comprise the **Collaboration for Justice** focusing on the areas of Judicial Performance and Ethics, Criminal Justice Reform, Immigration Court Reform, Payday Lending Reform/Economic Inclusion, and Family Law. The Chicago Council of Lawyers works independently of Chicago Appleseed in its efforts to evaluate judges for the purpose of educating voters.

Programs

Judicial Performance and Ethics

The Center for Judicial Performance and Integrity (Center). The Center includes the Judicial Performance Commission of Cook County, which uses judicial evaluations to help improve the quality of the judiciary through research-based reports, judicial performance improvement plans, and court watching. The Center also focuses on making judicial campaign contributions more transparent, and on making judicial recusal standards more rigorous if judges have received substantial campaign contributions from the lawyers or litigants appearing before them. In addition, Chicago Appleseed sponsors the www.VoteforJudges.org campaign – a nonpartisan voter education website that posts all judicial evaluations as well as information about judicial elections.

In November 2011, Chicago Appleseed and the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform submitted an amicus brief in support of stronger recusal policies to the Illinois Supreme Court when it reconsidered *Avery v. State Farm*. In September 2012, Chicago Appleseed joined with the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform and the Campaign Legal Center to file an amicus brief in *Illinois Liberty PAC, et al. v. Madigan*, arguing that Illinois' campaign disclosure and donation regulation laws are constitutional.

Criminal Justice Reform

Diversion. We are currently advocating for substantial changes in the court system aimed at diverting thousands of non-violent offenders out of costly jails and into drug and mental health treatment programs – including the creation of a Diversion Section within the Criminal Division of the Circuit Court, and earlier assessment to identify cases for dismissal or diversion. While working closely with the Cook County Justice

Advisory Council, we are researching justice system innovations and their potential applications in Cook County. In June 2012, we released our report, *Strategies to Enhance and Coordinate Cook County Diversion Programs*. We then hosted a public forum to discuss these diversion strategies. Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and other key stakeholders participated in the forum with *Chicago Reader* reporter Mick Dumke moderating.

Immigration Court Reform

Transforming the Immigration Court System. In collaboration with National Appleseed, the Appleseed Network of Justice Centers, and national law firms Akin Gump and Latham & Watkins, Chicago Appleseed produced major reports, Congressional testimony, and advocacy materials detailing recommendations that will make the immigration court system fairer and more efficient. In 2012, we released our latest report, *Reimagining the Immigration Court Assembly Line: Transformative Change for the Immigration Justice System*, which has received national attention.

Payday Lending/Economic Inclusion Reform

Improving the Community Lending Environment. Chicago Appleseed helped pass legislation limiting the predatory practices charged by payday lenders. We recently completed a small dollar lending toolkit and profitability analysis model for community banks and credit unions interested in developing small dollar/payday alternative loan products.

Family Law

Child Support. We are working to make the Illinois child support system more efficient and effective. In collaboration with the Presiding Judge of the Cook County Circuit Court Domestic Relations Division, we are working to identify proposed innovations and review existing improvements to ensure that the court treats fairly and equally both marital and non-marital children.

Pro Bono Opportunities

We are seeking pro bono assistance in the preparation of Policy Briefs – research and advocacy papers that 1) explore current trends in public policy and/or 2) explore the constitutionality and legality of statutes and policies. In particular, Chicago Appleseed policy briefs investigate and propose policy innovations that can improve Chicago, Cook County, and/or Illinois courts and legal systems. Proposed topics include:

- **The Criminal Justice System: Fairness of Indigent Defendant Fees/Fines and Increasing the Use of Non-Monetary Pretrial Release**
- **Immigration Court Reform: Impact of Video-conferenced Hearings**
- **Increasing Pro Bono Representation of Detainees in Immigration Courts**
- **Exploring Proposed Innovations in Child Support Proceedings**
- **Guest Blogging.** Chicago Appleseed has redesigned its website (www.chicagoappleseed.org) and weblog (<http://chicagoappleseed.org/blog/>) to encourage dialogue about our work. The weblog is updated regularly with advocacy based on our collaborative work with the Chicago Council of Lawyers, as well as with other organizations.

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