

The Collaboration for Justice: Pro Bono Opportunities from the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice and the Chicago Council of Lawyers

Chicago Appleseed seeks to identify injustices in our community, to investigate their causes through research, and to propose effective solutions. The **Chicago Council of Lawyers** is a public interest bar association advocating for fair and effective administration of justice. The two organizations work together as a **Collaboration for Justice**. Each of our pro bono projects is designed to generally require 25 to 50 hours of time per individual, and our staff and advisory board members offer intensive mentoring. If you are interested in unique pro bono opportunities that change lives at the system level, please contact Malcolm Rich at malcolmrich@chicagoappleseed.org or 312.988.6552.

The Center for Judicial Performance and Integrity.

- **Protecting Judicial Independence.** Millions of dollars in contributions by individuals and by special interest groups are fueling judicial campaigns in Illinois. Volunteers are needed to analyze the feasibility of public financing of judicial election races, including combining public financing with matching funds through a small donor campaign program.
- **Protecting the Integrity of Judicial Elections.** The election and retention of qualified judges depends upon an educated public. Volunteers are needed to assist in the re-design and implementation of our non-partisan web and media based campaign—the VoteForJudges.org Campaign—to educate voters about judges seeking retention on the general election ballot and about judicial candidates running in the March Illinois primary. While tens of thousands of persons already use this website, our goal is to reach substantially more prospective voters.
- **Evidence-Based Decision-Making for the Cook County Civil Courts.** We believe that the Cook County needs better information about how the court system operates day-to-day before effective court reform ideas can be implemented and evaluated. Chicago Appleseed has released a policy brief advocating for comprehensive docket data reporting in the criminal courts in Cook County. We would like to prepare a companion brief concerning docket reporting in the civil courts. The policy memo will examine other state systems used for compiling and disseminating meaningful docket statistics for their courts, and would outline the processes available to implement best practices for data collection, retention, and utilization.

Criminal Justice

- **Protecting the Right to Appointed Counsel.** The United States Constitution guarantees criminal defendants who are unable to afford an attorney the right to court-appointed counsel. A 2013 Chicago Appleseed investigation revealed a troubling series of developments in the Cook County Circuit Court where judges routinely limited or barred indigent defendants' access to fee-free representation by a public defender without conducting statutorily-required hearings to determine financial eligibility. In response, Chief Judge Timothy Evans issued a general order reminding judges that limits on defendant access to public defender services must follow statutory and constitutional procedural requirements. Chicago Appleseed seeks pro bono assistance to develop and participate in a monitoring program that will oversee compliance with the Chief Judge's general order. Volunteers are needed for program development, court watching, report writing, and advocacy efforts.
- **Maximizing the Potential of Pretrial Services in Cook County.** Nearly 70% of all admissions to Cook County Jail involve arrestees who are charged with nonviolent felony offenses. For many of them, the

arrests are the product of substance abuse or mental health problems. Other jurisdictions around the country—including New York City, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee—have experienced measurable success in improving efficiency and reducing recidivism by employing a more robust pretrial services system to assess defendants for treatment diversion programs as early during the criminal adjudication process as possible. We would like to prepare a best practices report that outlines how Cook County criminal defendants can be assessed as soon as possible after arrest, with the goal of increasing treatment diversion. Volunteers are needed to perform legal and policy research, as well as report writing.

- **Reducing the Time Between Arrest and Arraignment.** Illinois law currently gives prosecutors up to 30 days from the date of a criminal defendant's arrest to complete a preliminary hearing or obtain an indictment from a grand jury. Other large metropolitan jurisdictions around the country have laws permitting prosecutors significantly less time to accomplish the same work, creating substantial economic and social savings without added risk to public safety. We seek to develop a legislative campaign to bring Illinois law in accord with these other states. Volunteers are needed to perform factual and legal research, draft legal memoranda, and draft model legislation.

Community Justice

- **Fairness and Efficiency in the U.S. Immigration Court.** Chicago Appleseed in collaboration with National Appleseed and our pro bono partners produced two major reports outlining the needs for major reforms in the U.S. Immigration Court. One of the resulting recommendations—eliminating the need for immigrants to file Freedom of Information Act requests to get their own records—is now an amendment in the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744), now pending in the U.S. Congress. Volunteers are needed to help implement this amendment and other reforms through the crafting of proposed federal rules and legislation, and the writing of policy positions and editorial pieces for the media and for publication. Topics include:
 - Increasing pro bono representation in deportation cases.
 - Right to video conference proceedings that meet the basic tenets of due process
- **Improving the Child Support System.** Receiving child support payments can make a huge financial difference for Cook County families. We are currently working with the Circuit Court of Cook County to identify the need for reform, to produce recommendations for reform, and to work for their implementation. Volunteers are needed to conduct policy research and to assist in implementing substantial changes to the ways in which the state agency and the Circuit Court deal with child support.
- **Education Policy Related to Reducing School District Inequities.** Volunteers are needed to analyze whether the use of school social workers can facilitate the turnaround of underperforming schools, and to develop specific recommendations and proposals for school districts and policymakers.
- **New Approach to Increasing Pro Bono Time.** Volunteers are needed to research and prepare a policy memorandum examining the impact of the new rule in New York requiring 50 hours of pro bono time before an individual can be registered as a lawyer in New York. This work will include preparing recommendations as to whether such a rule is desirable for Illinois.

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