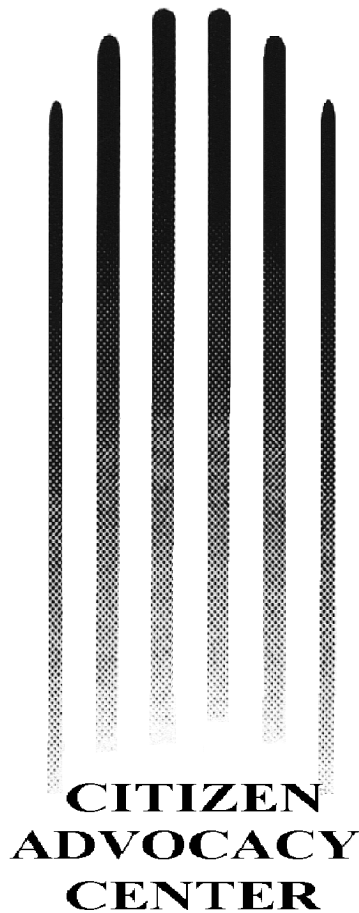


# **CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER**

## **2007 ANNUAL REPORT**



**THE CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER  
IS DEDICATED  
TO BUILDING DEMOCRACY  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
BY STRENGTHENING  
THE CITIZENRY'S CAPACITIES,  
RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONS FOR  
SELF-GOVERNANCE.**

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## **Citizen Advocacy Center 2007 Annual Report**

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The Citizen Advocacy Center (Center) is an award-winning, non-profit, non-partisan, free community legal organization. Founded in 1994, the Center's mission is to build democracy for the 21st Century by strengthening the public's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance. Center community lawyers simultaneously engage in community organizing, coalition building, advocacy, civic education, and litigation to create systemic reform. The Center functions as an antidote to civic disengagement and community powerlessness by empowering the public to make government more accountable through increasing democratic protocols at every level of government and developing the voice of the public.

Throughout 2007, individuals, community groups, the press, and public officials called or visited the Center to obtain free civic materials, ask community lawyers questions, engage in civic discussions, access public information, learn about local public policy issues, attend training workshops, and develop civic skills.

The Citizen Advocacy Center's four major initiatives in 2007 were:

- Public Education and Capacity Building
- Building Institutions and Community Resources
- Government Accountability and the Development of Systemic Democratic Protocols
- Litigation and Issue Advocacy

## *Public Education and Capacity Building*

The Center is first and foremost a resource for civic information. In 2007, our community lawyers and volunteers helped concerned citizens create active and vibrant democratic communities by using essential civic tools and the law to organize effective community campaigns. Regardless of the subject matter or the point of view of those making the inquiry, Center community lawyers answered inquiries and built the capacity of citizens to participate in local affairs.

**Center community lawyers, volunteers, and interns worked with individuals and community groups in more than 50 communities in 2007 and answered more than 250 questions from concerned citizens on public interest topics such as:**

- Can a community group distribute fliers during an open, public meeting?
- Can school board members wear a 'vote yes' button while talking about a school referenda?
- How can citizens organize to reduce teardowns in their community?
- When can an advisory body appointed by a public body meet in closed session?
- Can tax increment financing monies be transferred among districts?

**The Center hosted, planned, spoke at, or participated in presentations to civic groups and schools across Chicagoland. The following list of activities does not include the Center's regular attendance or participation in public body meetings:**

### **January**

- Citizen Action Project Community Organizing Meeting (Grayslake) (January 4)
- Confederation of Northern Illinois Peace Groups (Elmhurst) (January 7)
- Arts in Chemistry N.F.P. (Elmhurst) (January 11)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (January 25)
- Campaign Finance Reform Coalition Meeting (Chicago) (January 30)

### **February**

- Midwest Public Interest Fair (Chicago) (February 3)
- Midwest Democracy Network Meeting (Chicago) (February 13/14)
- CAC Program: Sunshine Media Training Seminar (Elmhurst) (February 16)
- Freedom Force Community Group (Elmhurst) (February 20)
- Glenbard West High School (Glen Ellyn) (February 22)
- Gregory Middle School (Naperville) (February 23)
- Algonquin Community Group Organizing Meeting (Algonquin) (February 28)

### **March**

- Glencoe League of Women Voters Training Seminar (Glenview) (March 13)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (March 15)
- Campaign Finance Reform Coalition Meeting (Chicago) (March 19)
- Statewide Meeting of Regional Superintendents (Springfield) (March 21)
- Northern Illinois University Election Law Seminar (DeKalb) (March 26)

## **April**

- DuPage Against War Now (DAWN) Training Session (Glen Ellyn) (April 3)
- Wheaton Rotary Talk (Wheaton) (April 4)
- Elgin Peace and Justice Organizing Meeting (Elgin) (April 7)
- Illinois State Bar Association Judicial Independence Symposium (Chicago) (April 10)
- Benedictine University Youth Government Day (Lisle) (April 16)
- Mundelein Concerned Citizens Meeting (Mundelein) (April 23)
- Heartland International, Russian students visit (Elmhurst) (April 26)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (April 27)
- State League of Women Voters (LOWV) Convention; Sunshine Seminar (Chicago) (April 27)

## **May**

- Elmhurst College, Political Science Presentation (Elmhurst) (May 1)
- CAC Program: Electricity Rates in Illinois (Elmhurst) (May 7)
- Hinsdale Central High School (Hinsdale) (May 8)
- Westwood College CAC Visit (Elmhurst) (May 9)
- Chicago School Presentation (Chicago) (May 11)
- Heartland International, Indonesian visitors (Elmhurst) (May 15)
- Glenn Westlake Middle School (Glen Ellyn) (May 18)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (May 24)

## **June**

- Wheaton City Council Meeting (Wheaton) (June 4)
- Bloomingdale Township Democrats Meeting: Home Rule Presentation (Carol Stream) (June 12)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (June 21)
- Midwest Democracy Network Meeting (Wheaton) (June 21/22)
- League of Women Voters Convention: Sunshine Presentation (Chicago) (June 22)
- DuPage County Board Meeting: Public Comment (Wheaton) (June 26)
- Court Monitoring of First Amendment Case: Jeff Zurawski (Wheaton) (June 27)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (June 27)

## **July**

- Lombard Community Group Organizing Meeting (Lombard) (July 12)
- Court Monitoring of First Amendment Case: Jeff Zurawski (Wheaton) (July 12)
- Intern Night (Elmhurst) (July 18)
- Elmhurst Community Group Organizing Meeting (Elmhurst) (July 24)
- Freedom Force Community Group (Elmhurst) (July 31)

## **August**

- Hinsdale Community Group Organizing Meeting (Hinsdale) (August 13)
- Freedom Force Community Group (Elmhurst) (August 14)

## **September**

- McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum Annual Teachers Fair (Chicago) (September 11)
- Freedom Force Community Group (Elmhurst) (September 18)
- Addison Community Group Organizing Meeting (Elmhurst) (September 19)
- Wheaton League of Women Voters: How Open Is Illinois Government? (Wheaton) (September 20)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (September 20)

## **October**

- Equal Justice Works Conference (Washington D.C.) (October 6)
- LaGrange League of Women Voters Sunshine Training Session (LaGrange) (October 11)
- Constitution Day, Downers Grove South High School (Downers Grove) (October 25)
- State League of Women Voters Judicial Evaluation Meeting (Chicago) (October 26)
- Heartland International, Indonesian visitors (Elmhurst) (October 29)

## **November**

- Island Lake Community Group Organizing Meeting (Island Lake) (November 1)
- Oak Brook Community Group Organizing Meeting (Elmhurst) (November 6)
- McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum Election Exhibit Grant Opening (Chicago) (November 8)
- Wheaton League of Women Voters Tax Increment Financing Presentation (Wheaton) (November 15)
- DuPage County Civic Summit Organizing Meeting (Wheaton) (November 15)
- Addison Community Group Organizing Meeting (Addison) (November 26)

## **December**

- McCormick Tribune Youth Media Workshop (Chicago) (December 7)
- “We the People” State Championship (Chicago) (December 7)
- Heartland International Armenian visitors (Chicago) (December 13)
- Broadview Citizen Group Organizing Meeting (Elmhurst) (December 13)
- Chicago Academy High School (Chicago) (December 18)

## **Citizen Advocacy Center Youth Programs**

### The Civic Empowerment Zone

The Civic Empowerment Zone is the Center’s hands-on civic education program that helps educators and youth transform their communities into “civic labs” and teach what it means to be a “good citizen” in practice. With generous funding from the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the Center’s Civic Empowerment Zone seeks to systemically reform civic education and provide innovative resources to help educators integrate hands-on civic activities into curriculum. In 2007, the Center worked on the following:

### *Organizing Guide to Regional Civic Education Summits*

The Center was a lead organizer in helping the DuPage County Regional Office of Education convene the first regional Civic Summit in the country. In an effort to help other Regional Offices of Education build on DuPage County’s success, the Center created a comprehensive organizing guide that outlined how to convene a regional conference on civic education. The organizing guide addressed how to build a steering committee, how to raise funds to convene the event, how to conduct outreach to achieve maximum participation in the event, and a one-year planning timeline. The Citizen Advocacy Center and the Regional Superintendent of DuPage County presented the organizing guide at a meeting of Illinois Regional Superintendents to discuss DuPage County’s successes in convening the Civic Summit, the important role that Civic Summits play in promoting youth civic education, and how the Citizen Advocacy Center and the DuPage County Regional Office of Education can be a useful resource and provide useful tools in helping other regional offices execute their own Civic Summits.

### Hands-on Lesson Plans

The Center continued to augment its library of action-oriented lesson plans to build the capacity of teachers to impart civic knowledge. All lesson plans are available on the Center's website and can be adapted for middle school students. New lessons developed in 2007 are in bold.

- **Legislative Simulation Lesson**
- **Redistricting: What is Fair?**
- **Accessing the Ballot: How Hard Should It Be To Become a Candidate?**
- **Municipal Government: Where Citizens Can Have the Biggest Impact**
- **Ballot Initiatives at the Local Level**
- How to Draft a Bill
- Home Rule
- Reform by Popular Movement
- Judicial Independence
- Third Party Barriers to the Ballot
- Active Use of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment
- Balancing the Budget: The Budget Game
- Basic Legal Research
- Bill of Rights
- Campaign Finance
- Civil Rights in the Post 9/11 USA: Military Tribunals
- Fifth Amendment: Protection Through Procedure
- First Amendment Unit (4 lesson plans)
- Fitness Plan for Democracy
- Fourth Amendment: Search and Seizure
- Freedom of Information Act
- How a Bill Becomes a Law
- Introduction to Active Citizenship
- Jury Duty
- Making a Difference: What is a Citizen and What Can Citizens Do?
- Open Meetings Act
- Personal Financial Information: Protecting Privacy
- Politics and the Media
- Post 9/11 Due Process: The USA PATRIOT Act
- The Preamble to the Constitution
- Voting Systems: What is Fair?
- Who Represents You?
- Young Citizens and Media Access
- Young Citizens and Television Broadcasters
- Young Voters

### Educational Collaborations

In 2007, the Citizen Advocacy Center worked with the following schools:

- Benedictine University
- Chicago Academy High School
- Downers Grove South High School
- Dunbar Vocational High School
- Elmhurst College
- Glen Westlake Middle School
- Glenbard West High School
- Gregory Middle School
- Hinsdale Central
- West Chicago Community High School
- Westwood College
- Wheaton Academy
- York High School

The Center also participated in the following community forums:

- Lead organizer in the DuPage County Regional Summit on Civic Education Steering Committee
- Contest Judge for We the People Civic Education Contest
- Participant in the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum Constitution Day
- McCormick Tribune Youth Media Workshop

### Student Internship Program

The Center has an extensive student internship program. Law, college and high school students volunteer or intern and work with community lawyers on public policy projects. Students investigate complaints about government action, facilitate community programs, audit public body policies and much more. In 2007, the Center hosted students from the following schools:

- York High School
- Wheaton North High School
- Wheaton Academy
- Elmhurst College
- Benedictine University
- Indiana University School of Law
- University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign School of Law
- University of Vermont Law School,

Students revised or produced the following brochures:

- Land Use in DuPage County (NEW!)
- Primer to Being a Local Public Official (NEW!)
- The Freedom of Information Act (Revised)
- The Open Meetings Act (Revised)
- Tax Increment Financing (Revised)
- Public Comment in Illinois (Revised)

In 2007, the Center was a conference presenter at the Equal Justice Works Career Fair in Washington D.C. More than 1,000 law students gathered to meet public interest employers and attend workshops on various issues related to public interest law. The Center facilitated a workshop titled: Thinking outside the public interest box – becoming a community lawyer.

### **Community Programs and the Open Forum**

Helping community groups organize, educating the public about their civic and legal rights, providing a forum for the public to debate current issues of public concern, and stimulating community discussion and awareness on issues of public significance are important components of the Center's work. The Center hosted, moderated, or helped to facilitate the following programs:

- Citizen Action Project: Organizing Around Property Tax Assessment Concerns
- Confederation of Northern Illinois Peace Groups
- Open Government Media Training Session
- Glencoe League of Women Open Government Training Session
- DuPage Against War Now Referendum Training Session
- Wheaton Rotary Open Government Presentation
- CAC Democracy Workshop
- State League of Women Voters Open Government Training Session
- CAC Evening Program: The Electricity Rate Debacle in Illinois
- Bloomingdale Township Democrats Presentation – Home Rule
- CAC Evening Program: Summer Intern Night
- Wheaton League of Women Voters Open Government Forum
- LaGrange League of Women Voters Open Government Forum



## **Everyday Democracy**

The Center published four issues of our newsletter, *Everyday Democracy*. Center community lawyers and student interns contributed to the editorial content. Newsletters published since 1999 are posted on the Center's website.

### **Winter Articles:**

- Local Politics and the First Amendment
- Citizen Initiative Awardees - Inspiring Civic Participation
- 2007 Legislation to Watch
- Citizen Advocacy Center Welcomes New Community Lawyer
- Citizen Advocacy Center's Midwest Open Government Project

### **Spring Articles:**

- Benedictine University Youth Government Day
- A Taste of Public Interest Law
- Experiencing Public Interest Before Billable Hours
- Citizen Advocacy Center Submits Testimony At House Subject Matter Hearing for Campaign Contribution Limits
- A Jump Start for Democracy
- "It is I" The Bruce Roberts Memorial Fund

### **Student Intern Summer Articles:**

- Working for the Benefit of the Community
- Education for the Real World
- Beyond A Legal Experience
- Open Government: *Real* Power to the People
- Learning about the Benefits and Challenges in Working for the Common Good
- Congratulations Citizen Advocacy Center Board Member Gordon Goodman For Winning The Downers Grove Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Citizen of the Year Award

### **Fall Articles:**

- Citizen Activists Now Have Protection Against Getting "SLAPPED"
- Building Democracy Internationally
- Democracy Watch: Term Limits & Citizen Initiatives
- CAC Welcomes New Community Lawyer
- FCC Holds Public Hearing On Broadcaster Ownership
- Open Meetings Act Legislative Update

*Government and Corporate Accountability  
and the Development of Systemic Democratic Protocols*

The Center responds to citizen inquiries and monitors local governments for undemocratic practices and policies that systemically bar citizen participation in the democratic process. While the Center worked on dozens of issues, the following are examples of concerns addressed in 2007:

**Midwest Open Government Project & the Midwest Democracy Network**

The Center is part of the Midwest Democracy Network, which was formally launched in 2007. The Midwest Democracy Network is a coalition of reform organizations committed to improving democratic institutions in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The coalition is broad-based and seeks to reduce the influence of money in politics; keep our courts fair and impartial; promote open and transparent government; create fair processes for drawing congressional and legislative districts; guarantee the integrity of our election systems; promote ethical government and lobbying practices; and democratize the media.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a research partner of the Midwest Democracy Network, and, with funding from the Joyce Foundation, launched our Midwest Open Government Project in 2007. The purpose of the project is to research and analyze Freedom of Information and Open Meetings statutes in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The Center began an intensive and comprehensive comparative analysis that will include the analysis of more than 1,000 cases and 40 interviews. The end product will be individual state reports that highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each state's open government laws and provide an analysis of the effective implementation of open government statutes. Additionally, the Center will produce a tool box of resources that the public and public officials can use to improve government accessibility, transparency, and accountability.

**Citizen Action Project**

The Citizen Action Project is a non-profit citizen group from Grayslake that was formed when home owners became concerned about property assessment practices within Lake County, specifically the ambiguous nature by which assessments occur. The Center provided technical and legal assistance to the group in relation to their goals of understanding the tax assessment process, identifying inequities in the system, and identifying systemic solutions for reforms. This volunteer community group created a report that documented unfair and inconsistent assessment practices. The result was the introduction of Senate Bill 2820, The Homestead Assessment Transparency Act, which mandates disclosures of assessed valuation of homestead property that is currently not required by law.

**Public Comment Policies and Infringements on First Amendment Rights**

While most Illinois public bodies are not required to provide a public comment opportunity for the citizenry, when public bodies proactively allow for public comment, a non-traditional public forum has been created which affords First Amendment protections to all those who choose to speak. When the City of Wheaton attempted to create a policy that prohibited political speech during the general public comment period, the Center took action. We highlighted that political speech was the essence of the First Amendment and that the common definitions of the word political included "of or concerning the structure or affairs of government," "relating to government, a government, or the conduct of government" "pertaining to politics, of or relating to the conduct of government." The Center succeeded in having the unconstitutional policy removed after organizing citizens, working with the press, and challenging public officials.

Center community lawyers emphasize non-litigious approaches to using the law to strengthen the democratic process. Only as a last resort, and on behalf of select citizen causes, does the Center litigate to challenge abuses of power and to remove systemic barriers that impair citizen access to local government.

### **Public Disclosure of School District Superintendents Contract**

Is a school district's superintendent's contract public record? This was the subject of a Freedom of Information Act request made by a citizen to the Wheaton-Warrenville Community Unit School District 200. The District claimed that the superintendent's contract was contained in the personnel file, and therefore per se exempt from the public disclosure. Mr. Stern, the requestor, contacted the Center for general assistance and asked us to work with his pro-bono attorney in the litigation he filed against District 200 seeking disclosure of the contract. The Center assisted in the litigation preparation, and in addition to filing a motion with the Second District Appellate Court to obtain permission to file an Amicus Curiae brief, developed an extensive public disclosure argument based on the Illinois Constitution. The Circuit Court ruled against Mr. Stern and the case is pending in the Second District Appellate Court.

### **SLAPP Suit Legislation**

Building the capacity of citizens to engage in public affairs and educating the public in how to be effective in impacting how public officials set public policy are core elements of the Center's work. However, the phenomena of SLAPP suits, or Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, have been effective in chilling public participation in government affairs. The purpose of SLAPP suits is to intimidate citizens who seek to petition their government, assemble to have their voice heard, and utilize their Freedom of Speech to affect public policy decision-making. More often than not, a SLAPP suit is filed by a developer against a citizen or citizen group who speaks out at government hearings or to government officials about environmental or zoning issues.

For several years, the Center has helped citizens organize to influence the General Assembly to pass legislation that provides protection to those who seek to become involved and active members of the community. In 2007, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation to provide protection to citizens who are subject to SLAPP suits. The Citizen Participation Act states that citizens who engage in constitutionally protected actions are immune from liability, regardless of intent or purpose of their actions. Additionally, the Court is required to rule in favor and award reasonable attorney fees to citizens who seek to have their voice heard through engaging in constitutionally protected activity.

### **Campaign Finance Reform**

The Center continued to work on limiting the influence of money in Illinois politics by testifying at an Illinois House subject matter hearing on candidate contribution limits from individuals, corporations, labor organizations, and political committees of public office candidates, established political parties, and legislative caucuses. The Center's testimony highlighted that a healthy democracy relies on a balance between government accessibility, accountability, and transparency and effective, informed, and sustained citizen participation. The free flow of money into the political system has earned Illinois a long and well-documented reputation for political scandals attributable to every level of government and has increased the cost of political campaigns, decreased the pool of candidates, and decreased the effectiveness of small donors.

## *Building Institutions and Community Resources*

### **International Coalitions**

The Center continued to host representatives from international non-governmental organizations, public officials, and students from developing democracies. The purpose of the visits were to help individuals learn how to build democracy at the grassroots level and build the capacity of individuals, community groups, and public officials to plant the seeds of democracy and help it flourish. The Center hosted visitors from:

- Russia: High school students learning about democracy and civic engagement;
- Indonesia: Representatives from non-governmental organizations, academics, and local public officials; and
- Armenia: Representatives from non-governmental organizations.

### **Democracy Day**

Annually, summer interns showcase their projects in a program that is open to the public. Interns work under the direction of community lawyers and volunteers, and learn how the government really works.

## *Leadership and Staff*

### **2007 Board of Directors:**

President: Theresa Amato  
Vice-President: Barbara Greenberg  
Secretary: Gordon Goodman  
Treasurer: Brian Conlon

#### Directors:

Keith Allen	Patricia Hicks	Andrew Prinz
James Ekblad	Milt Honel	Josh Silverstein
Steve De La Rosa	Claire Nader	

### **2007 Advisory Council Members:**

Porus Dadabhoy	Corinne Johnson	Ellen Raymond
Matthew DuPree	Ken Lerner	David Pezza
Rita Gonzalez	Kate Millett	Jeremy Taylor
Myrrha Guzman	Scott Mitzner	

### **2007 Staff:**

Mrs. Eddi Feret, Office Manager  
Ms. Susanna Stone, Esq., Community Lawyer (February 2007 – August 2007)  
Ms. Natalie Brouwer, Esq., Community Lawyer (September 2007 – present)  
Ms. Terry Pastika, Esq., Executive Director/Community Lawyer

## *Support, Contributions and Donations*

The Center is financially supported by individual donations and foundation grants. The Center does not accept government or corporate money. Generous foundation support was provided by:

- The Alphawood Foundation
- The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
- The Joyce Foundation
- The McCormick Tribune Foundation
- The Shafeek Nader Trust for the Community Interest

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- Individual donations
- The Public Interest Law Initiative for a summer intern scholarship

Tax compliance services are donated by:

- Ms. Linda Yates and the firm of Andrich, Argo & Associates, Ltd. CPA's

Banking services are donated by:

- Cole Taylor Bank

While the Center has hundreds of volunteers, we would like to specifically recognize the following individuals for their outstanding dedication and substantial assistance to the Center:

- Mark Daniel, Esq., Rathje & Woodward
- Jill Dressner, Esq.
- Ms. Sarah Klaper, Esq.
- Mr. Jack Uretsky, Esq.
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### **Thank you to the 2007 Interns:**

- Dan Basler
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- David Copp
- Ann Fefferman
- Jesse Traugott
- Reid Huefner
- Gabriel J. Gardner
- Matt Davis

The Center complies with all record-keeping and filing requirements mandated by state and federal law. Our corporate records are available for inspection at our office and are on file with the appropriate State agencies. The Center does not release the names of all of our individual donors nor do we sell our mailing list to other groups. The individuals listed in our Annual Report have agreed to be recognized.

The Center welcomes donations of time, energy, equipment or money. Donations to the Center are tax-deductible as provided by law.

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## **CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER GOALS**

- **To make government more accountable to the people by increasing democratic protocols and by developing and empowering the voice of citizens;**
- **To further the public understanding of civic tools and the skill of the citizenry in using these tools for societal problem solving;**
- **To promote individual and community efforts to resolve contemporary societal problems involving the rights of citizens, workers, shareholders, taxpayers, and consumers and the health, safety, and welfare of the communities we serve;**
- **To stimulate citizen awareness of and action on issues of public significance;**
- **To improve access to government-held information, access to the airwaves, access to the ballot, and access to the courts;**
- **To advance justice by: 1) increasing the awareness of and commitment to community lawyering/advocacy; 2) by encouraging lawyers, professionals, and volunteers to build democracy at the local level; and 3) by replicating the work of the Center.**