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**Consumer Group Disputes U.S. Chamber's "Report" on IL Business Climate
Says Chamber Has No Basis to Attack Illinois Communities**

Chicago- The Center for Justice & Democracy – Illinois today called the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's fourth annual state liability rankings, which attacks the state's business environment, "completely unwarranted, unfair, and contrary to the opinion of business leaders in the state."

Amber Hard, Staff Director of the Center for Justice and Democracy-Illinois said, "The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has no business coming to Illinois and attacking the business climate in our state and communities, when other analyses find Illinois among the top locations in the country to locate for business. The U.S. Chamber should be promoting our businesses, not hurting them."

In 2004, *Site Selection* magazine ranked Illinois the third best business climate in the country. For Madison County, Illinois, part of the booming St. Louis suburbs, the U.S. Labor Department reported that workers saw an 8.8 percent increase in average weekly wages during the final three months of 2003, making it No. 2 in the nation, and "leaders are taking their latest distinction to prove their business climate is second to none."

But according to CJ&D, for several years now, the U.S. Chamber has decided to publicly criticize Illinois, and Illinois' Madison County, as well as states like West Virginia, using a questionable survey of corporate lawyers including in-house counsel of major corporations. "The U.S. Chamber has a political interest in lambasting both these states, each of which is in the midst of heated partisan political battles over their state's legal system and so-called "tort reform," said CJ&D's Amber Hard. "The U.S. Chamber seems utterly unconcerned with the actual business climate in or the impact their survey might have on the communities they are hurting."

"I've seen a lot of things in the newspaper with tort reform and that stuff. But I've been in contact with local chambers of commerce trying to attract people to Madison County, and we agree Madison County is a good place to locate business,' [Madison County Board Chairman Alan] Dunstan told the Belleville News Democrat in July, 2004. 'There has been a lot of propaganda in the last election year.'"

Much of the rhetoric in Illinois has centered on medical malpractice issues. ISMIE Mutual (the state's largest malpractice insurer) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce falsely claim that out of control litigation is causing an upward surge in malpractice premiums, even though there is a large amount of evidence to the contrary. "Rather than

using a biased study to promote an anti-consumer agenda, the Chamber should examine initiatives that really will bring down malpractice litigation---reducing malpractice,” said Hard.

She pointed to the Leap Frog Group, a project of some of the country’s largest employers. Because most incidents of malpractice never result in litigation, employers who provide health care coverage must shoulder the financial burden of paying for injured patients care. The Leap Frog Group aims to reduce malpractice by providing safety plan for hospitals, taking a survey of hospitals to determine how well safety plans are implemented, and educating the public about the results of that survey. “The Leap Frog Group is a good example of a business project that is a win-win for patients and business,” added Hard.

“But the U.S. Chamber seems to be more interested in political maneuverings, than actually helping Illinois’ consumers,” she said The U.S. Chamber has established a Southern Illinois newspaper called *The Madison County Record*, presenting readers with biased accounts of cases and pro-“tort reform” commentary. According to the Washington Post, the U.S. Chamber is refusing to tell readers about its connection to the paper “because it might be pre-judged.” Professor Michael Hoyt at the Columbia School of Journalism said, “If this is an attempt to poach the legitimacy of independent reporting, to falsely fly under that flag, then it’s unethical.”

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