

Center for Justice and Democracy's Illinois Focus Fall 2005 Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the Center for Justice and Democracy's "Illinois Focus". This is a regular publication to keep you up to date with the activities of CJ&D-Illinois and how to be involved.

• **Malpractice Survivors Fight for Patients' Rights**

As you may know, Governor Rod Blagojevich recently signed the medical liability bill that severely limits what patients injured by medical malpractice can receive in "quality of life" compensation. The cap is \$500,000 for suits against doctors and \$1 million for suits against hospitals. We strongly believe that this law is unconstitutional and legal challenges are on the horizon. The law would be devastating to families who have been injured or lost loved ones due to medical negligence. Further, continued research indicates that the cap will do nothing to lower doctors' insurance premiums or keep doctors practicing in Illinois. We would like to thank everyone who has worked with us in attempts to defeat this bill, helping us create a strong record against the legislation, and ensuring that many legislators voted with us. Over the past 8 months, survivors of medical malpractice have helped CJ&D do the following:

- Host a press conference prior to President Bush's visit to Collinsville in January that earned national as well as local media attention.
- Testify in numerous hearings in Springfield before committees in both the Illinois House and Senate.
- Organize multiple press conferences throughout the State of Illi-



Patients for Justice member, Pamela Thomas tells reporters about her malpractice incident on the steps of the capitol.

nois, including an 11 day tour of the state where we brought a 15 foot wheelchair to different communities to bring attention to harmful effects of compensation limits.

- Hold lobby meetings with legislators both in Springfield and their own district offices.



Donna Harnett and her son, Martin outside Governor Blagojevich's Chicago office participating in a memorial services for the 44,000—98,000 people who die every year as a result of medical errors.

While we lost the battle, our efforts were not in vain. The legislation pushed by insurance companies and some legislators was even more cruel than the legislation that the Governor eventually signed. The fate of the law will now be determined by the Illinois Supreme Court that has twice found caps to be unconstitutional. Thanks again for all your help. We will continue to educate the public about the pervasiveness of medical errors and with your help, we will win the hearts and minds of the public and shed truth and reason on a debate clouded by misinformation and scare tactics.

Tell Senators Dick Durbin and Barack Obama to stand up for patients' rights. Vote no on anti-patient legislation!

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed HR. 534, which would impose a cap of \$250,000 on "quality of life" compensation. Not only is this bill more cruel than the one passed by the Illinois State Legislature, but it will force every state in the nation, including those that have found it unconstitutional, to adopt the federal cap. The cap would also apply to cases involving drugs and medical devices and provides even more protection for drug companies if their drugs, like Vioxx, were approved by the FDA. Call Senators Durbin and Obama today and tell them to vote no on any anti-patient bill that comes before the U.S. Senate.



Senator Barack Obama: Toll Free—(866) 445-2520
Senator Dick Durbin: (312) 353-4952, (217) 492-4062,
or (618) 998-8812

Join us in the fight to preserve citizens' access to the civil justice system!

If you read the Chicago Tribune on August 26th, you might have come across this alarming headline.

More lawsuit limits sought Malpractice caps called only 1st step

Many lawmakers and special interest groups are not going to stop because they passed medical liability restrictions in Illinois. In fact, large corporations, insurance companies, and their allies in the legislature are seeking more ways to prevent consumers from getting the justice they deserve after being wronged by a corporation or negligent doctor. We also know that this new law will be challenged in court as unconstitutional. CJ&D will be here, working to educate consumers, lawmakers, and the media about the devastating effects these proposals would have and how they take away some of our cherished constitutional rights.



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Dear Friends of CJ&D,

This has been a huge year for Center for Justice and Democracy. Having opened our first field office in Illinois in late December, we have put a fierce effort into protecting the rights of patients and consumers. As you can tell from reading this newsletter, we would not be able to do the work that we do without the volunteerism of people who have been impacted by medical errors or egregious wrongdoings of corporations. We would like to thank everyone who participated in lobby meetings, press conferences, and committee hearings for your help in making CJ&D-Illinois an effective organization.

As we look to the future, it is clear that there has not been a time in recent history where the work of concerned consumers is more needed. We will put hard work and effort into erasing the damage done by insurance companies who blame patients for their own mismanagement and price-gouging, we will do all we can to assist in litigation challenging the cap, and we will fight efforts of giant corporations and their front groups to further strip away the constitutional rights of citizens who are devastated by corporate misconduct. Our success will be partly determined by the support we receive from people like yourself. We need your help. Please, contact us at Illinois@centerjd.org to find out how to get involved.

Thank you,

Amber Hard, Staff Director * Mark Fraley, Field Organizer