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Center for Justice and Democracy's Illinois Focus Fall 2006 Newsletter

- **CJ&D Continues to Fight for Consumer and Families**

Center for Justice and Democracy-Illinois and our network of consumer advocates are persistent in our efforts to preserve access to the courts amid new attempts by corporations and their front groups to close the courthouse doors to injured consumers.

Our patients' network has been actively involved in the fight for survivors of medical malpractice. This spring we worked successfully against a U.S. Senate bill that would have imposed a nationwide cap on compensation for those injured by medical negligence even more severe than the cap passed in Springfield last year. Senator Dick Durbin, after hearing from Patients for Justice member, Donna Harnett, spoke out against the bill in the Congressional Record, using the case of Donna's son, Martin Harnett, as an example of how malpractice survivors would be devastated by caps on compensation.

We also continue to work on the state level to raise awareness about the disastrous compensation limits that became law just over a year ago. On the one year anniversary of the bill signing, we teamed up with Illinois Citizen Action and several Patients for Justice members to publicly urge Illinois lawmakers to repeal the caps as they are harmful to survivors of medical malpractice and have proven to be ineffective.



Amber Sexton, Ms. Wheelchair
Illinois

We are actively engaged with our civil justice advocacy network to portray the voices and faces of people who have been injured or lost loved ones to corporate or individual negligence. One of our volunteers, Amber Sexton, recently won the Ms. Wheelchair Illinois pageant and wrote an op-ed in the Aledo Times on the importance of the civil justice system. Amber became paralyzed in an automobile collision because the manufacturer designed a seat belt it knew to be ineffective to save \$12 per car. She is a dedicated advocate for people with disabilities and has fought aggressively for preserving injured consumers' right to trial by jury.

Health Courts: Unfair to Patients

This year, both the U.S. Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee held hearings on a dangerous proposal to establish "Health Courts" to resolve medical malpractice disputes. CJ&D testified in the House against these proposals in July. Schemes like health courts take important decisions away from impartial judges and juries and puts them in the hands of political appointees, who can be lobbied by insurance and pharmaceutical companies. These "health courts" make it more difficult for survivors of medical malpractice to receive full and fair compensation. Moreover, they limit accountability for negligent doctors and hospitals. For more information, contact Illinois@centerjd.org.

Ryan Scandal Highlights Importance of Civil Justice System

The bribery scheme for which former Secretary of State and Governor George Ryan has now been sentenced may never have been exposed had it not been for Illinois' civil justice system.

A civil lawsuit by Reverend Duane Scott and Jane Willis, who lost their six children in an automobile collision triggered an investigation into the license for bribes scheme that was ran through Ryan's office as secretary of state. The Willis' were represented by Chicago attorney, Joe Power. This case lead to the conviction of 79 state officials and truckers, who were involved in the scheme. The Willis' lawsuit exposed corruption in Illinois' highest offices and made our roads safer.

Big Businesses and their allies in the legislature are trying to make it more difficult for legitimate lawsuits, like the Willis', from receiving their day in court. Please contact us at Illinois@centerjd.org, to get involved in the fight to preserve our legal institutions that hold wrongdoers accountable.



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Join CJ&D - Illinois' Civil Justice Citizens' Coalition

CJ&D's Civil Justice Citizens' Coalition is a statewide group of Illinoisans and their families who have used the civil justice system to hold a wrongdoer accountable. This is a network of victims and their families who have served as plaintiffs in a lawsuit. Our mission is to educate Illinois residents about the effect of laws that take away the legal rights of citizens and consumers and weaken accountability for negligence and injury in our state.

Our success in fighting the anti-consumer agenda of large corporations and their friends in the legislature will be partly determined by the willingness of people who have sought justice in the courts to speak at press conferences, attend hearings, write letters to the editor, or simply provide moral support. To find out more about the CJ&Ds Civil Justice Citizens' Coalition, please contact us at Illinois@centerjd.org or call (312) 644-8442.

