

Accomplishments and Current Systemic Reform Efforts of the Collaboration for Justice of the Chicago Council of Lawyers and Chicago Appleseed.

Chicago Appleseed and the Chicago Council of Lawyers (Council) have been collaborating for more than 20 years to identify injustices and inefficiencies in the Cook County civil and criminal courts, including access barriers for non-represented parties, judicial and procedural unfairness, and ensuring evidence-based practices are used throughout the justice system. Through best practices and grassroots research, we identify and propose solutions to systemic problems in our courts and in our communities.

Chicago Appleseed is one of 18 research and advocacy organizations focusing on systemic reforms throughout the U.S. and Mexico. The Council is a place for attorneys who want to give back to their communities through projects that promote social justice. Our 4 person program staff and a corps of volunteer lawyers, paralegals, and other professionals work on projects meant to promote systemic reform, including increased access to justice, immigration court reform, criminal justice reform, children and family law, police and prosecutorial accountability, state court fairness and accountability, and projects on the federal courts. In addition, the Council provides well-respected evaluations of state judicial candidates and sitting judges, and evaluations of nominees to the federal bench in Chicago.

The Collaboration for Justice between Chicago Appleseed and the Council has led to a long list of solid accomplishments.

- We have kept hundreds from being imprisoned through community-based drug treatment provided by the Access to Community Treatment (ACT) Courtroom 201, which we helped plan, implement, and manage.
- We helped create the Coalition to End Money Bond, and we helped persuade Chief Judge Evans to issue a general order that has resulted in a reduction in the Cook County Jail population by more than 1400,
- We have helped get legislation enacted which as of July 2019 will dramatically reduce the unfair imposition of court costs, fines, and fees on defendants.
- We are training Assistant Public Defenders throughout Illinois on how to oppose the corrosive court costs, fines and fees on those least able to afford them.

- We persuaded the Domestic Relations Division of the Circuit Court to stop operating a separate but unequal court system for the thousands of unmarried parents seeking child support each year.
- We helped the Circuit Court plan, implement, and monitor a program using administrative law judges working with Circuit Judges to dramatically reduce the time taken for unrepresented parents to get their child support orders. These administrative law judges have heard more than 1500 cases in their first year, and the time taken to get child support has dropped from months to as little as one day.
- Our www.VoteforJudges.org voter education website was used in 2018 by more than 100,000 persons.
- We have six systemic reform pro bono projects now being conducted by lawyers in firms and corporations. Our goal is to increase this to 12 by the end of 2019.

The Collaboration for Justice between Chicago Appleseed and the Council is currently doing the following:

- Urging the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts to implement court recording in Circuit Court eviction courtrooms, allowing for the making of a record. Litigants will not be able to appeal effectively, and judges will be held accountable.
- Working with the People's Lobby and Reclaim Chicago, we will produce data-rich status reports on the State's Attorney's Office in an effort to hold that office accountable.
- Working to enact legislation stopping the required and harmful electronic monitoring employed at the end of each defendant's sentence.
- Working to research and develop legislative fixes to harmful consequences to electronic monitoring being used pretrial.
- Working with First Defense Legal Aid and the Cook County Public Defender's Office to help increase the quality and quantity of representation being provided to those arrested and in police stations.
- Working to seek systemic fixes for the dysfunctional immigration bond hearing system.
- Working with the Coalition to End Money Bond.
- Working to educate the public about the importance of voting for qualified judges, and developing proposals to improve the quality and diversity of the Circuit Court bench.

We are demonstrating that this model of collaboration leads to more accomplishments than either of our organizations could do alone. We strive to make the Collaboration for Justice an equal partnership through which we utilize paid staff, pro bono assistance from law firms and corporations, and board members who volunteer their time.

Respectfully submitted,

Malcolm Rich, Executive Director