

The **ACLU** News

Chapter Update from the President

Government spying on its citizens, the rights of detainees, freedom of the press and civil unions are among the priority issues for Champaign County ACLU during the last several months.

After Gary Issac's compelling talk at our annual meeting last April about the legal battle of Guantanamo detainees, chapter members spent several weekends at the Farmer's Market in Urbana gathering signatures on letters to U.S. Representative Tim Johnson asking for support of federal legislation to restore **habeas corpus** rights under the Military Commissions Act. Steering Committee member Carol Inskeep joined ACLU members from across the country in Washington D.C. to rally support for the legislation (see her story inside) and in July we met with Rep. Johnson here in the district. **House Resolution 2826**, sponsored by Ike Skelton, Chair of the House Armed Services Committee, is likely to be voted on in October. It is one of several bills that would restore the fundamental right of people detained as enemy combatants to be told of the charges brought against them. Although Rep. Johnson did not commit to a "yes" vote, he was generally supportive and we are encouraged by his vote in August against extension of the **Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)**.

The FISA allows the federal government to spy on any communication by private citizens with people in other countries, even if no terrorist activity or other criminal intent is suspected. The bill that passed in August extends FISA for six months. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has promised to bring forward legislation to enact changes in the law within 90 days and staff in the national ACLU office are working to help draft those changes.

Responding to the ACLU of Illinois' organizing campaign, our chapter has been working to build support for **The Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act, House Bill 1826**. The Act would create the option for any two adults in Illinois to enter into a civil union that provides "the same protections, benefits and

responsibilities under law" as are granted to spouses in a marriage. The legislation also states that nothing in the Act should be construed to interfere with or regulate religious practices of any faith with regard to marriage. The Act was approved last spring by the Illinois House Human Services Committee. In May, we contacted chapter members in the 104th and 105th representative districts asking them to contact State Representatives Bill Black and Shane Cultra to ask for their support of the bill. HB 1826 was not called for a vote but the deadline for final action was extended into next spring's session.

On September 5, we co-sponsored with the local chapters of National Organization for Women and Equal Marriage Illinois a forum about civil unions and equal marriage rights. State Representative Naomi Jakobsson (103rd) attended and said she would sign on as a co-sponsor of HB 1826. Chapter members who live in the 104th and 105th districts still have time to contact your State Representative to ask him to vote "yes" on HB 1826 next spring. The ACLU of Illinois has made passage of this legislation a top priority for 2008 and has hired a new field organizer to build support for HB 1826.

We were pleased to see an editorial in The News-Gazette on September 6 supporting religious freedom and applauding Governor Blagojevich for his veto of Senate Bill 1463 which would have mandated a moment of silent reflection in all Illinois public schools. A moment of silence in public schools is already optional but SB 1463 mandated that every teacher lead the moment of silence. Area legislators Naomi Jakobsson and Bill Black voted against the bill.

You can receive timely updates about pending state legislation affecting civil liberties when you sign up for the ACLU of Illinois email alert. The more people who participate, the stronger the voice for civil liberties in the state capitol. Please go to www.aclu-il.org to join.

- Esther Patt

ACLU BACKS JOURNALIST'S RIGHT TO ATTEND PRESS CONFERENCE

In June, Champaign County ACLU was contacted by Brian Dolinar, a reporter for the *Public I* newspaper published by the Independent Media Center. Mr. Dolinar had gone to a press conference held by Champaign Police Chief R.T. Finney the day after three police officers had been shot near West Side Park. Before the press conference started, Chief Finney told Mr. Dolinar that he would have to leave. Mr. Dolinar told us that he had not been disruptive and had not even had the opportunity to ask a question because he was banned from the event before it started.

The local chapter referred Mr. Dolinar to the ACLU of Illinois office. Adam Schwartz, an attorney with the Roger Baldwin Foundation of ACLU wrote to Chief Finney on June 20 saying in part:

"For at least 30 years, it has been clear that 'arbitrary or content-based criteria for press pass issuance are prohibited under the first

amendment' Thus, for example, a federal appeals court held that the Secret Service cannot withhold press passes from journalists seeking access to the White House, unless the restrictions are 'no more arduous than necessary' to achieve 'a compelling governmental interest' These principles, which are necessary to protect the interests of both journalists and the general public in effective news-gathering, are ingrained in modern First Amendment jurisprudence."

On July 2, Chief Finney replied to Mr. Schwartz' letter saying that all press conferences held by the city in a public forum may be attended by any media representative and that Mr. Dolinar would be able to gain entry into future press conferences at the Police Department by presenting the press credentials he is provided by *Public I* and signing in at the front desk.

THOUSANDS PARTICIPATE IN ACLU LOBBY DAY

"I never thought our government would be defending torture and detention without trial," lamented one ACLU member from Illinois who had ridden on an all-night bus to Washington DC. It was a common sentiment of the over 4000 participants in the ACLU's national "Day of Action to Restore Law and Justice" that took place this past June. Motivated by a genuine fear that the most basic rights of our Constitution are under threat, activists from all 50 states, with the support of over 250,000 petition signers, descended on Capitol Hill to press Congress to restore habeas corpus, to end US sponsored torture, and to uphold due process for anyone who is detained.

"Governments don't take away rights— unless they intend to commit wrongs."

- Sister Diane Ortiz

The day's events brought together a broad coalition of groups, including the ACLU, Amnesty International USA, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, The American Conservative Union, and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, as well as several prominent senators and representatives. Speakers at the opening rally stressed that without a guarantee of due process and a basic respect for human rights, all other Constitutional rights are in jeopardy.

The Illinois delegation met with representatives of Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Barack Obama, both of whom expressed support for the coalition's goals, with Durbin taking a strong leadership role on legislation. Tim Johnson's staff person was reluctant to take any specific stands supporting the restoration of habeas corpus, and was equally hesitant on issues around torture and detention without trial.

Those who came to Washington, some traveling thousands of miles, left with a renewed commitment to the long fight to defend these most fundamental political rights. The grave importance of these issues was brought home by one of the rally's most moving speakers, Sister Diane Ortiz, a torture victim (at the hands of the military government of Guatemala) who represented many torture survivors who were also in attendance. "Governments don't take away rights," said Ortiz, "unless they intend to commit wrongs."

- Carol Inskeep

UPDATE ON CIVILIAN POLICE REVIEW

For several years, ACLU Steering Committee members have been helping local officials with their exploration of creating mechanisms for civilian review of police conduct.

The Urbana city council created a **Police Review Board** in August and Mayor Laurel Prussing is actively seeking fair-minded people to serve on the board.

However, in Champaign it appears we're back at square one. On July 31, the Champaign City Council

heard testimony from community leaders and members of a city task force, including our own ACLU steering committee member, Stan Levy, who have been studying civilian review of police for more than two years. Despite the outstanding presentations by task force members and the strong support expressed by community leaders, including prominent members of the African American community, a majority of the council opposed further consideration of creating a review board.

ACLU Officers & Steering Committee

The local ACLU Steering Committee meets on the first Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm, in the conference room at Campbell Hall (WILL studios) in Urbana. Meetings are open to members—if you would like to be placed on the agenda, please contact Esther Patt or any other committee member ahead of time.

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**Fall Gathering
Sunday Oct 28th!**

**We're on the Web!
WWW.ACLU-CU.ORG**

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**COMMUNITY UNITY MARCH IV
OCTOBER 13TH**



Champaign County ACLU will be one of the co-sponsors of the 4th annual Community Unity March organized by C-U Citizens for Peace and

Justice. The purpose of the march is to unify people around local issues such as police/community relations and the treatment of racial minorities by the criminal justice system. The march begins at noon on Saturday, October 13 at two locations: West Side Park in Champaign and the Champaign County Courthouse in Urbana. The two branches of the march will meet at University and Wright Streets to march together down Fourth Street (which bears the honorary title of John Lee Johnson Way) to Douglass Park for a rally.

**LOOK FOR ACLU AT YOUR
WORKPLACE**

If you are an employee at any public workplace, you can use payroll deduction to donate to the Roger Baldwin Foundation of ACLU. Donations to Roger Baldwin Foundation are tax-deductible. You will find the Roger Baldwin Foundation of ACLU listed in your charitable fund drive booklet under COMMUNITY SHARES OF ILLINOIS.

Sunday, October 28th

2007 Champaign County ACLU Fall Gathering at the home of Carol Spindel and Tom Bassett
See details inside.

Saturday, October 20th

2007 ACLU-IL Bill of Rights Celebration at the Hyatt Regency Chicago
Contact: Marcia Liss at mliss@aclu-il.org or 312-201-9740 x303 <http://aclu-il.org/brc/>