

**Judicial Evaluation Commission Project**  
2008 Issues Briefing  
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At the June State Convention, delegates passed a motion to promote the creation of a Judicial Evaluation Commission which would evaluate Illinois judicial candidates with the purpose of providing voters information with which to make better informed decisions. Michelle Jordan and Laurie Bergner are the co-chairs of this committee.

***Efforts and Activities: September 2007 - February 2008***

Since then, we have focused our efforts on developing and working with a coalition of individuals and organizations which are knowledgeable and committed to the same goal. The core of that coalition includes Malcolm Rich from the Chicago Council of Lawyers and Cindi Canary and Margo Alpert from the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. Both organizations have already been involved in work related to this issue. We pulled together a wider group to meet and explore the issue in October. This group of 25 included a mixture of our League members, community groups, bar associations and lawyers.

Since then, we have continued our efforts to widen our network of potential coalition partners and to increase our own knowledge of this subject.

- We have consulted with Jordan Singer, Director of Research for the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, who will continue to work with us.
- We attended the strategy session for the Illinois reformer organizations at ICPR at which HB222, the Judicial Public Financing bill, was evaluated and strategy was discussed.
- In December, members of our committee began work evaluating the Illinois Constitutional Convention, including meeting with former Illinois State Comptroller Dawn Clark Netsch. The Illinois Constitution Convention is on the ballot for 2008; if a Con Con takes place, there is a possibility that a JPE could be established by constitutional provision.
- We have also talked with a variety of individuals including: Ralph Brill, head of Legal Writing at Chicago Kent College of Law, who has enlisted many retired judges who are interested in working on the JPE project; Bob Graham from Jenner and Block; Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan; and Rob Warden, Executive Director for the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University Law School.
- We attended the Justice at Stake winter strategy meeting in Washington DC.

### ***Current and Future Plans:***

Malcolm Rich has received a grant from the Joyce Foundation that we believe could be utilized to develop a pilot project for a one-year Judicial Performance Evaluation, overseen by a high-prestige Judicial Evaluation Commission, for the 2010 election. We are hoping that a successful pilot program could then be used to get support from legislators for creating a permanent Judicial Evaluation Commission. A crucial part of this project is the goal of improving the judiciary by using evaluations to provide feedback to judges for self-improvement. This would involve regular evaluations, some of which would be mid-term evaluations that would be for confidential feedback to judges. Providing these results to judges before those conducted during election years gives judges the opportunity to use them to improve their performance before they are again evaluated for the public. We also anticipate polling the public on their perceptions of the judiciary. We are also discussing other activities that the Commission might conduct that could further improve the judiciary.

In the immediate and not-so-immediate future, we have the following plans:

- develop a working model for a Judicial Evaluation Commission
- meet with a wide group of coalition partners to discuss the model 3/28
- begin an education program for judges and bar associations around the state regarding the Judicial Evaluation Commission project
- poll the public on perceptions of the judiciary
- create a high profile Judicial Evaluation Commission for the pilot project
- issue a State of the Judiciary report