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## Note from Dr. Mary L. Milano, IGAC Director

*“Because we believe, we dare to hope.  
Because we believe and hope, we can love.”<sup>1</sup>*

The late Benedict XVI is not an author I typically would quote, but reading the above my thoughts turned not to doctrine but to the living witness and example of so many members of the GAC staff. What distinguishes them from many other groups in public service, is not that they are somehow better, keener, more long lived in the same roles or agency, although I believe personally that they are all that (no slight to others in public service – I have come to know these folks and their work better). As you can infer from the articles even in this short newsletter, they really are different. What distinguishes them actually is love.



It is easy to talk about love in an emotional way, or a conceptual way or even a sort of pragmatic way as the glue that keeps people together. But when I use it to describe the characteristic of the GAC front line staff it is more the sustaining power of a commitment to the “other” that seeks to promote not the lover but the ones loved, and to undertake to do whatever it takes to enable those others to reach their highest potential, their most often unspoken dreams and their fullest possibilities.

Many “outsiders” looking at our clients and those we serve see what they think is the reality of those persons. But because GAC people look much deeper, further within and touch with their own aspirations those of the ones we serve. This is a dynamic based on what they – what we – believe. And that is that every person can and wants to become more, more of who they really are. Because we believe that, and believe it about every single one of our clients, wards, constituents and in fact communities, as well, frankly, as ourselves, we hope for what may not be apparent. And we work, as you see in these few pages, to remove the barriers that inhibit, dis-able and disguise what our belief tells us can and must and in fact will become visible, tangible, realized.

And so we can love. We cannot just do the work, but know with conviction that we in so many ways become the work, not just for those we serve, but with the intimate connection that proves that the work is really done by them. We are the ones who are gifted to be here with them. That is what love in our work is all about.

Mary

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism: Sidelights of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997) p.20



## HRA Case Spotlight – Hospital Behavioral Unit

This case spotlight summary is based on a report created by the HRA and the response from the individual facility. This case has been voted on by the regional HRA to be made part of the public record.

The Peoria Regional HRA received a complaint regarding a patient that was admitted for inpatient care at a hospital but was not allowed to use the phone. The complaint alleged that the phone restrictions were excessive. The HRA investigated that case and found that the patient was on restriction from the phone from 12/31/21 until discharge on 1/17/22. The restriction was initially implemented due to the service recipient making inappropriate phone calls to a facility where he resided and was transferred from for care, including making threatening calls to another resident at the facility.

The HRA found that the hospital did not make efforts to have the restriction lifted during the recipient's inpatient stay. Calls from attorneys, advocates,

and the hospital chaplain were permitted, but not all the time. The HRA also discovered the recipient was not being allowed to contact the ombudsman from the facility where he resided. The Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code (405 ILCS 5/2-102 & 103) requires "... unimpeded, private and uncensored communication" and the facility is to provide services in the "... least restrictive environment, pursuant to an individual services plan." The HRA reviewed no evidence that the facility had attempted to work with the patient



to have the restriction lifted and allow the patient to receive services in the least restrictive environment. The HRA substantiated the findings and asked that the facility ensure that when telephone communication is restricted, the facility needs to still provide services in the least

restrictive environment. Additionally, the facility should conduct periodic reviews of the restriction and work with the recipient through treatment planning to attempt and have the restriction lifted. The HRA also determined that the documented reason for the rights restriction was vague, while the Code states that when a recipient receives a restriction, they need to be provided "... notice of the restriction or use of restraint or seclusion and the reason therefor ...".

The HRA asked that the facility provide more detail when completing a rights restriction so that it is clear why the restriction is being given and also provide periodic reviews of the restriction with the recipient to see if the restriction is able to be lifted. The facility responded to the report by stating they provided training for staff on completing rights restrictions and began an auditing process to assure that rights restrictions are reviewed daily to see if the patient can have the restriction lifted. The Peoria HRA was satisfied with the response, so the case was closed and made a part of the public record.

## HRA Case Spotlight – Daycare Facility

This case spotlight summary is based on reports created by the HRA and the response from the individual facility. This case has been voted on by the regional HRA to be made part of the public record.

The Peoria regional HRA received a complaint regarding discharge at a daycare facility. The complaint was that a childcare facility was threatening to expel a student who was a foster child with an individual family service plan (IFSP). This child receives occupational and development therapy for sensory

needs. The complaint alleged that the day care was not providing full support to meet the needs of the child.

The HRA reviewed informal logs documenting the child's behavior and determined that the behaviors escalated between March and June/July, but the daycare did not start the process of developing a formal behavioral plan until late June. The record also did not provide evidence that the daycare reached out to other available resources to provide interventions for the child. The daycare handbook informs families

that the facility can terminate services with a child if they determine a child to be unsafe, and the facility provides notice to the parent. Additionally, the handbook stated the daycare would seek transition services, but there was no record that the daycare attempted to find these services, which is part of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) licensing standard 407.250. The HRA also questioned that the facility developed a behavior plan without consultation from a professional clinician or even the child's primary care

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## **HRA Case Spotlight – Daycare Facility** *continued from page 2*

physician. The DCFS licensing standard (402.270) states that “Clinical behavior management plans may be developed to meet the needs of a particular child if developed with the parent and a professional clinician.” The HRA asked that the facility update their Parent

Handbook with a step-by-step guide for parents/guardians on how the daycare will create a behavior plan and who is involved with the creation of that plan. The plan must also align with DCFS licensing rules. The HRA also asked that the facility cease in the practice of

terminating services of children when the behavioral plan has not been created and staff have not been trained on implementation of the plan. The facility updated the handbook and the HRA closed the case, making it a part of the public record.



## **Special Education Collaboration Success Story**

The Special Education Collaboration legal team of Emma Dorantes and Kelly Franklin had a major success with a family in need of intervention. The legal team had a case that entered legal last fall when a school district was trying to place a student with severe anxiety/non-attendance issues into a therapeutic day school that was not appropriate. The placement was a restrictive environment intended for students with emotional disturbance-type issues. This was a challenge for two reasons; 1) this was not a case for STAY PUT, as the parents did

not want the student attending the regular middle school and 2) by the time the case was presented to the team, the parents had already placed the child into a private placement without prior written notice to the district. Unsure what the parents ultimately wanted, the legal team finally requested mediation this winter.

After 3 or 4 continued mediation sessions and negotiations with District counsel, the legal team reached a full agreement. The student is to be attending a nearby

therapeutic day academy that is therapeutic and not for behavioral issues, which the student does not have, AND the parents are going to get partial reimbursement for the copays they paid out to the private placement/therapist.

This is a great placement for this student going forward. The legal team worked hard to resolve this situation and move the student to an appropriate situation. Congratulations on the resolution and great job to Emma and Kelly!



## **Human Rights Authority Outreach**

East Central Disability Rights Manager Lara Davis recently presented to the “Intro to Developmental Disabilities” class at The University of Illinois in Champaign. The class is an elective class for undergrad students that are majoring in nursing, psychology, social work and pre-med. There are about 60 students in the class that received information about the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission including details about the Human Rights Authority. Lara discussed the complaint process, types of complaints, reports and findings. Additionally, Lara spoke about how the HRA is unique in its use of volunteers and how all regions are always looking to fill vacancies. The class had a page full of questions for Lara about the agency and the services the HRA provides

and also asked many questions after the presentation. A few students expressed interested in volunteering as a board member. This was a great opportunity to explain to future professionals about the services the HRA provides in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Lara discovered this opportunity from a local Facebook group titled “CU Able.” The course instructor, Emily Tarconish, was looking for people with disabilities or agencies that assist people with disabilities to present to her class. Emily was very excited about having Lara provide information about the agency. There was such great feedback from the students that Emily invited Lara to present to the class every Spring semester. Additionally, Emily

teaches other disability courses at the University and may have Lara come and present to those classes as well.

Additionally, the Metro East Disability Rights Manager Jodi Russell-Baum had an informational table at the Homeless Connect, held Saturday at River of Life Church in Alton. The event attempts to pair homeless people with various agencies and services and is held in conjunction with the annual homeless count required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Denise Bradley, who is the Madison County Mental Health Program Manager (and former HRA board member) stated “We have collaborated with community-based organizations and



## **Human Rights Authority Outreach** *continued from page 3*

volunteers from across Madison County to bring essential and otherwise hard to access services to people living on our streets. This event excels in connecting our most

vulnerable to vital resources throughout Madison County in a one day, one place event.”

Thanks to both Lara and Jodi for getting the word out to their communities about the GAC and HRA.



## **Kenya Jenkins-Wright Honored**

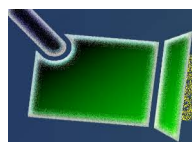
The IGAC is pleased to announce that our General Counsel, Kenya Jenkins-Wright was honored by the Chicago Bar Association with its prestigious Earl Burrus Dickerson Award. The award, given this year to three lawyers and three judges, was



established in honor of the late Earl B Dickerson, the first African American to graduate from the University of Chicago, one of the first to be admitted to the Chicago Bar Association, and among many other firsts, argued the case before the U.S. Supreme Court that successfully challenged enforcement of racially restrictive covenants on the South Side of Chicago and opened the door to fair housing for all persons.

The award recognizes the work and achievements of African American lawyers who are contributing to the cause of justice at the highest level of engagement. To give you an idea of its reach, previous recipients have included Justice Joy Cunningham, Justice Ann Williams, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Attorney General Kwame Raoul, Chief Judge Timothy Evans, James Montgomery, (post-humously) Mayor Harold Washington, and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Congratulations to Kenya for such an honor!



## **GAC Commissioner Spotlight – Sonny Choi Williams**

Sonni Choi Williams currently serves and works as the City Attorney for the City of Lockport, Illinois since being appointed to the Commission in June of 2017. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Williams worked for the City of Peoria for over 17 years. She has over 23 years of experience in municipal law and litigation of civil, state and federal tort and injunction cases including arguing before state and federal appellate courts and the Illinois Supreme Court.

Ms. Williams was admitted to practice in 1999; U.S. District Courts: Central District-IL in 2002 and Northern District-IL in 2017; U.S. Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit in 2007; and U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. She received her J.D. from the Northern Illinois University College of Law in 1999 and her B.A. in history from the University of Iowa in 1994. Ms. Williams was appointed by the Illinois Supreme Court to the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism from 2005 to 2016 and to the Illinois Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission Hearing Board, currently as a Panel

Chair presiding over attorney disciplinary cases. She is a member of the American Bar Association; National Asian Pacific American Bar Association; Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA); Illinois Local Government Lawyers Association (ILGL); Will County Bar Association; Will County Women’s Bar Association; Black Bar Association of Will County; DuPage County Bar Association; Chicago Bar Association; and the Women Bar Association of Illinois. Ms. Williams served two terms on the ISBA Assembly, two terms on the ISBA Board of Governors (2012-2018), and on the ILGL Board from 2013-2019. She currently serves on the boards of the Korean-American Bar Association of Chicago; Asian-American Bar Association Chicago (honorary board), Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education (IICLE); Prairie State Legal Services, Northern Il-



linois University College of Law Board of Visitors (chair), and Lockport Township High School Foundation Board. She has served as the chair of the ISBA’s Local Government Law Section Council and the ISBA’s Racial and Ethnic Minorities and the Law Council. In June 2024, Sonni Choi Williams will be installed as the ISBA’s President, the first woman lawyer of color and first Korean-American and AAPI since its founding in 1877 to serve as president. Ms. Williams serves as the current Chair of the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission.

Awards include 2020 Northern Illinois University College of Law Alumna of the Year Award; 2014-2015 ISBA Diversity Leadership Award; 2010 ISBA Board of Governors Award; 2008 ILGL Annual Achievement Award; and 2006 NIU College of Law Young Alumnus of the Year Award. In 2022, Ms. Williams has been recognized as an Asian American Women in Leadership Honoree by the WBAI, KABA, and the AABA.





# RIVER CITY PRIDEFEST

The GAC participated in the River City Pridefest on July 15th. The event was held in Peoria on the river front and attracted 100 vendors, 60+ volunteers and 5,000 attendees! The day was filled with food, music, joy and the GAC staff was able to discuss advocacy with many attendees through the festivities. The GAC was honored to be at the event to support and provide information to the local Central Illinois LGBTQ+ community.







## **Call for HRA Volunteers**

The Human Rights Authority is the division of the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission statutorily empowered to investigate alleged violations of the rights of persons with disabilities including persons with mental illness, cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and the aged disabled. There are nine Authorities, organized by geographic region, throughout the state. The Human Rights Authority is unique in its use of citizen volunteers to conduct these investigations and make corrective recommendations. As such, Regional Authorities are always seeking to fill vacancies as they occur as well as maintain a pool of potential volunteer members for times when the need arises.

The membership of each Authority consists of nine volunteers. Three of these,

by statute, are themselves providers of disability services, one each from the area of mental health, developmental services and rehabilitation services. The other six members are private citizens, some of whom themselves might have a disability, have a family member with a disability or just be concerned citizens interested in disability rights.

Members attend monthly meetings and serve on investigative teams. These teams conduct fact-finding investigations to determine whether or not a complaint is substantiated. Investigations typically involve meetings with service providers, chart reviews and policy reviews. Members can expect to spend approximately 4 to 6 hours each month on Authority activities.

**Members receive both formal group training and less formal individualized training, and are reimbursed for travel, telephone, postage, and other related expenses.**

**The Human Rights Authority has been active for over twenty years. During that time the lives of thousands of persons with disabilities have been positively affected by the hundreds of volunteers who have served. We believe that current and former Members would attest to what a rewarding experience serving on a Regional Authority has been.**

If interested in volunteering, please visit this link

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/gac/HRA/Pages/Volunteers.aspx>

to download the volunteer application or to complete an application online. The application can be sent to  
Teresa Parks  
401 Main Street, Suite 620  
Peoria, IL 61602.

You could also contact our statewide intake number at 1-866-274-8023 or STATEWIDE TTY at 1-866-333-3362 to express your interest.

**IF YOU FEEL AS THOUGH YOUR RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED OR IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE OR INFORMATION FROM ANY OF OUR PROGRAM DIVISIONS, PLEASE CALL THE NUMBERS BELOW**

**STATEWIDE GENERAL INFO: 1-866-274-8023**

**INFO For Out-of-State Callers: 1-708-338-7500**

**STATEWIDE TTY: 1-866-333-3362**

**WEBSITE: <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/gac/Pages/default.aspx>**

**LIKE US ON FACEBOOK FOR INFORMATION ON THE GAC AND EVENTS**