



For Immediate Release:
May 15, 2005

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Malpractice Survivors Urge Lawmakers to Protect Patient Safety and Oppose “Caps” Bill

Chicago—Standing in front of a 15 foot wheelchair to symbolize their injuries caused by medical negligence, Mary Steinberg, Donna Harnett, and other malpractice survivors joined with Center for Justice and Democracy’s Patient Safety tour outside the Thompson Center today. The survivors called on Legislative leaders to stop legislation in each chamber to cap compensation to victims of preventable medical errors.

“This proposal would devastate people already distraught by their losses,” said Harnett, whose son, Martin, was injured at birth due to medical malpractice and will spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair, totally dependant on her for care. “People depend on this compensation to restore their quality of life. My son needs this money for basic necessities like special clothes with a flap for the feed tube he has to eat from. We need to protect patients, including women, children, and seniors. The insurance industry wants to take money from these people without even proving it would lower doctors’ insurance rates.”

The Chicago patients are part of a statewide Patient Safety Tour sponsored by the Center for Justice and Democracy, a non-profit consumer protection organization. The tour comes at a crucial time as both the Illinois House and Senate are poised to vote on legislation to cap compensation to medical malpractice victims. Until recently, Governor Blagojevich, Senator Jones, and Speaker Madigan had pledged their support for victims and families. Under pressure from the insurance industry, that support has wavered.

“Patients and consumer groups are asking local lawmakers to stand up for the rights of all Illinois residents to obtain justice through our courts system when they are harmed by a negligent doctor, hospital or nursing home,” said Mark Fraley, Field Organizer for CJ&D-Illinois. “The state is looking at our leaders right now. Governor Blagojevich, President Jones, and Speaker Madigan have the opportunity to stand up as heroes for patient safety and consumer protection by voting against these bills.”

“It is unbelievable that lawmakers are seeking to protect doctors who injure or even kill patients for the sake of insurance industry profits,” added Gene Stilp, Field Organizer with the Center for Justice and Democracy. “Chicago legislators need to stick up for their constituents and patients and protect their rights and safety.”

Bills under consideration in both legislative chambers would severely cap “non-economic” compensation to patients injured by negligent medical care. Numerous studies have shown that

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these caps do not work to lower malpractice insurance for physicians, but do severely limit the access of women, children, seniors, and the poor to the court.

“My case is already in the system,” said Steinberg, who lost her husband due to negligent medical care. “President Jones and Speaker Madigan need to make sure they never pass a bill that will devastate future victims. If they fail, Governor Blagojevich must stand by his pledge to protect the injured and sick by vetoing such a cruel proposal as caps on much needed compensation.”

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The Center for Justice and Democracy is a non-profit, non-partisan consumer protection organization that works to educate citizens about the importance of the civil justice system. For more information, see www.centerjd.org.

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