

Statement of Jack L. Block

I want to thank the President and the Cook County Board of Commissioners for considering me for the position of Commissioner to the Cook County Commission on Human Rights. Throughout my legal career, I have continuously fought to protect the rights of those who were subjected to discrimination, bias, and unfair practices. Through my service on the boards of civil rights organizations, my work as Deputy Director of the Legal Assistance Foundation, and participating in a number of significant civil rights cases, I have stood up for equal rights, constitutional rights, and human rights. Joining the Commission on Human Rights would further my commitment to ensuring that people are treated fairly and their rights are protected. I would be honored to have the opportunity to serve Cook County and its citizens.

With respect to my professional background, I practiced for many years as a Partner in the law firm of Sachnoff & Weaver (now Reed Smith) in Chicago. While at Sachnoff, I directed the firm's Pro Bono Committee and participated in a number of high profile pro bono and public interest cases. For example, I represented Associations of African American, Latino, Asian and Women Contractors who intervened in a lawsuit challenging the City of Chicago's Affirmative Action Construction Program; helped recover more than \$20 million dollars for classes of persons victimized by payday loans; represented victims of brutal, racially motivated hate crimes; and participated in a class action on behalf of women who were illegally stripped searched by the Chicago Police Department. Also, I represented an African-American FBI agent who was subjected to horrific racial discrimination and harassment, represented a group of City of Chicago minority aldermen in a lawsuit arising from remapping the City's wards, and successfully helped pursue a constitutional challenge to certain DCFS rules. From 2007 to 2012, I served as a Deputy Director of the Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF) where I oversaw projects that addressed a wide range of issues facing people who were living in poverty, including their problems related to housing, consumer rights, children and family law, public benefits, HIV/AIDS, employment, veterans, and immigration.

For many years I have served as the Midwest Chair and a Board Member of the National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in addition to serving as a Board Member and Chair of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee. Also, I was appointed as the Chair of the Chicago Bar Association Legal Aid Committee. In 2007, I received

the Loyola School of Law Convocation Award for outstanding achievements in public and pro bono service and in 2004, the ACLU Edwin Rothschild Award for contributions to the cause of civil liberties and social justice.

My background and experience with civil rights and human rights matters will enable me to make significant contributions towards improving the performance of the Cook County Commission on Human Rights and furthering its mission. In preparation for this nomination, I met with the Executive Director of the Commission who asked me to draw on my mediation experience to explore ways in which mediation can help expedite the resolution of cases filed with the Commission, achieve greater access to justice, and free limited resources for investigation and adjudication. I have considerable experience with mediation as an effective and efficient pathway through which parties can resolve disputes and achieve greater access to justice. I am a certified mediator and I currently serve on the Board of the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR). As an Adjunct Professor and Distinguished Practitioner in Residence at Loyola University Law School (Chicago), I have taught a number of mediation courses. In addition, I currently head the Mediation Committee of the Illinois Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. The Committee's primary purpose is to promote greater access to justice by making recommendations regarding the expanded use of court-based mediation programs within Illinois state courts. Needless to say, I welcome the opportunity to work with my fellow Commissioners and the Department of Human Rights & Ethics to develop a framework, with rules, for a workable mediation system for alternative dispute resolution of cases filed with the Commission.

In our conversations, the Executive Director also remarked on his concern about the lack of adequate legal representation for those complainants whose cases cannot be resolved during the investigation or conciliation phase of the Commission process. Once again, I believe that I can play an important role in re-establishing the relationship between the Commission and its non-profit and public interest law firm partners in the anti-discrimination space. By reaching out to the same community of lawyers who shared my work at LAF, National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, I can help insure that litigants with potentially meritorious claims receive high quality, pro bono legal counsel throughout the adjudication phase of the Commission process.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be honored to serve Cook County.