



Supporting Advocacy for Children
and other Disability Rights Initiatives



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Access to Education, Civil Rights are Focus of New Campaign for Kids with Disabilities

Chicago legal community joining together to promote Equip for Equality's advocacy efforts

A major new legal support initiative, the *Equality for Kids Campaign*, will launch this Tuesday at the Annual Celebration of Equip for Equality, Illinois' premiere statewide disability rights organization. The new Campaign will raise funds to support Equip for Equality's new Special Education Clinic and other disability rights initiatives, as well as promote pro bono support of Equip for Equality's advocacy for kids with disabilities.

"Access to education is the most common fundamental legal right denied to children with disabilities," said Duane Quaini of Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP, a co-Chair of the Campaign. "Without a proper education, children with disabilities are unlikely to lead independent, productive and successful lives as adults. I am very proud to be a part of this Campaign, and that funds will greatly improve the lives of thousands of Illinois children and their families for years to come."

"When confronted with any of the multiple barriers that face children with disabilities, most parents of children with disabilities do not know that they have rights. And for those few who do, nine out of every ten parents will lose their special education hearing without an attorney," said William Von Hoene Jr. of Executive Vice President and General Counsel of Exelon, also a co-Chair of the Campaign. "I strongly encourage my colleagues at law firms and corporations to join us in raising funds to enhance the services for children provided by Equip for Equality."

"I represented my own child with a disability in a special education hearing and learned how challenging this area of law can be," said Kevin Burke of Burke

Mahoney & Wise, also a co-Chair of the Campaign. “Funds raised by the *Equality for Kids Campaign* will provide more parents with the legal representation they desperately need for their children with disabilities.”

Two lead gifts have already been received: Kirkland & Ellis has made a \$50,000 contribution, and Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP is contributing \$45,000.

The Campaign Committee is comprised of leaders from other major law firms and corporations including Aetna, Baker & McKenzie, Bollinger Ruberry & Garvey, Deloitte Financial Advisory Services, Dykema, FTI Consulting, McDermott Will & Emery, Northern Trust, Pugh Jones Johnson & Quandt, Schiff Hardin, Seyfarth Shaw, Sidley & Austin and U.S. Equities Realty.

“Equip for Equality is very grateful to all of the law firms and corporations that are supporting the *Equality for Kids Campaign*,” says Zena Naiditch, President and CEO of Equip for Equality. “During troubling economic times, it is critical to raise private funds to support our advocacy for kids with disabilities.”

The scope of the unmet legal need for low-income people with disabilities in Illinois is profound, with access to education being the greatest unmet legal need. While Equip for Equality currently handles over 50% of education cases for all low-income households statewide, it does not currently have the resources to serve all of the people who need legal services for their children with disabilities.

“The *Equality for Kids Campaign* will significantly enhance our ability to provide legal services for kids with special education needs,” says Barry Taylor, Legal Advocacy Director at Equip for Equality. “Additionally, funds from the Campaign will allow us to expand our support of pro bono attorneys who want to join us in assisting children with disabilities.”

For more information about the *Equality for Kids Campaign* contact Barry Taylor at 312-895-7317 or barryt@equipforequality.org. To make a donation to the Equality for Kids Campaign on line go to www.equipforequality.org.

About Equip for Equality

Equip for Equality is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to advance the human and civil rights of people with disabilities. Equip for Equality is the fourth largest legal aid provider in Illinois, with 24 attorneys who assist children and adults with disabilities on a variety of issues, including enforcing special education rights. **For more information regarding Equip for Equality, please call Zena Naiditch, CEO, at 312-895-7314.**

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