

2009 JUSTICE CENTER PROGRAMS

Youth Law Education Project

In partnership with Hon. Richard Lee Price, chair of the NYCLA Law-Related Education Committee, and Debra Lesser, Executive Director of the Justice Resource Center, the NYCLA Justice Center hosted two more events utilizing the *NYC Youth Law Manual*, published in 2007. Thirty teachers of law-related education in the New York City public high schools participated in a lively seminar in February 2009 featuring a plenary panel on juvenile justice issues, followed by workshops on hate crimes, consumer fraud and internet legal research. In March 2009, hosted by John Jay College, 200 public high school students participated in the second citywide student conference. The students heard from a panel of lawyers and judges, who answered student questions about careers in the law, then enjoyed two series of interactive workshops—the first featuring lawyers and a judge discussing careers in the law, ranging from criminal defense to entertainment law, and the second focusing on legal issues like hate crimes, family law and identity theft. Students also toured John Jay College, which generously donated items for a raffle. Conference evaluations were extremely positive, endorsing the Justice Center’s commitment to providing resources for young people and their teachers.

High School Essay Contest

The High School Essay Contest has been sponsored for many years by the Law-Related Education Committee, which is chaired by Hon. Richard Lee Price. The Committee presented prizes and certificates to public high school students who wrote essays on the 2009 topic: “As Chief Legal Counsel to President Barack Obama, discuss at least three legal issues specific to undocumented immigrants.”

Consumer Debt Conference and Follow Up

The NYCLA Justice Center and the Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School sponsored the Consumer Debt Working Conference at Fordham in June 2008, attended by 190 elected officials, consumer law advocates, legal services providers, judges, debt collectors, government officials, law students and academics. The daylong program began with an overview of the problem of consumer debt, followed by a roundtable on the experience of litigants in the New York City Civil Court, where filings numbered over 300,000 in 2007. The afternoon program consisted of a series of workshops on topics such as arbitration, bankruptcy, Civil Court practice and reform, financial literacy and credit counseling, credit reporting, medical debt, post-judgment enforcement, and bank policies and practices. The organizations on the conference planning committee, which included the Coalition for Debtor Education, The Legal Aid Society of New York City, MFY Legal Services, Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation and Urban Justice Center, are now working together with other advocacy and legal services organizations to promote City, State and Federal legislation to address consumer debt issues.

Foreclosure Fora

In addition to *pro bono* programs sponsored by NYCLA’s *Pro Bono* Department to assist homeowners facing foreclosure, the Justice Center, in cooperation with the

Feerick Center for Social Justice, elected officials, advocates and legal services providers, is sponsoring a series of forums for community leaders and service providers in the outer boroughs to address the growing problems facing tenants in foreclosed buildings. In May 2009, a forum was held in the Bronx, with Staten Island scheduled for June and Queens and Brooklyn for the fall.

Public Fora

In January 2009, the Justice Center, Civil Rights & Liberties Committee and Criminal Justice Section sponsored a public forum, “Are Violation Pleas a Necessary Evil?,” to analyze the call for a moratorium on violation pleas because of the large numbers of African Americans and Latinos stopped and searched by the police and the collateral consequences of arrest and conviction.

In May 2009, the Justice Center sponsored a screening of clips from a Public Radio International (PRI) documentary series that looked at young people who had become exemplary achievers despite harsh backgrounds. The event featured Hon. Sonia Sotomayor, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, introducing the speaker, Ellis Cose, author, columnist and contributing editor for *Newsweek* magazine, as well as executive producer, host and writer for the PRI series. Judge Smith moderated the discussion that followed the screening. The Metropolitan Black Bar Association, Hispanic National Bar Association, Latino Justice PRLDEF and National Institute for Latino Policy co-sponsored the event.