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NEWS RELEASE

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Consumer Group Condemns Corporate Front Group for Attacking Judges and Juries Says "Judicial Hellhole" Report Undermines Democracy

The Center for Justice & Democracy today condemned a report from the corporate front group, the American Tort Reform Association (ATRA), that attacks judges and juries. In addition to Cook, Madison, and St. Clair Counties in Illinois, ATRA's unscientific report attacks a number of poor communities in the United States, including the Hurricane ravaged Gulf Coast of Texas. The "Judicial Hellholes 2005" report from ATRA, an organization supported by major industries and Fortune 500 companies, calls the Rio Grande Valley and Gulf Coast of Texas the worst so-called "Hellholes" in the country, with Illinois' Cook County (Chicago), suddenly becoming number two based on no actual or scientific data. Also added to a watch list is the nearly ruined Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

"This is incredibly brazen," said Amber Hard, Staff Director of CJ&D Illinois. "In this report, a corporate front group for companies found negligent in court is attacking those who are willing to hold them accountable. With money and politics already dominating the executive and legislative branches, our court system is one of the only places left in America where individual injured citizens can successfully confront powerful industries and institutions, force changes in their dangerous behavior and seek justice. Unfortunately, this kind of publication endangers this tradition, which has served and protected citizens so well for over 200 years."

Said Joanne Doroshow, Executive Director of the Center for Justice & Democracy, "These kinds of bogus political attacks on judges, particularly ones that target jurisdictions with poor and minority populations, threaten our democracy. When corporate front groups like ATRA orchestrate studies for the purpose of attacking judges and juries for decisions that hold reckless corporations accountable, the very foundations of our judicial systems are threatened."

“As an indication of how inaccurate this study really is,” concluded Hard, “three of the top six ‘Judicial Hellholes’ are identified in Illinois. Yet Illinois is the 13th most desirable state in the country to locate a business.” In Site Selection’s 2005 ranking of state business climates, Illinois ranked #13 in a ranking determined executive surveys, new plant performance, and other criteria.