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**BGA Inspired Investigation Finds Chicago City Council
Too Busy to Follow the Law or Show Up To Vote**

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS – An investigation of the Chicago City Council by the Better Government Association (“BGA”), the *Beachwood Reporter* and *Chicago Talks* found many of the 19 standing committees of the Council regularly vote without the required number of aldermen in attendance and routinely violate the Illinois Open Meetings Act. The full stories can be found at www.creatingcommunityconnections.org and www.beachwoodreporter.com.

ATTENDANCE

All public bodies, like the City Council committees, must have quorum in order to take official action - such as voting on a proposed ordinance. A quorum is the minimum number of alderman that must be present for a committee to take an official action.

In most cases, a City Council Committee needs half of its members present to form a quorum. Any action taken in the absence of a quorum is null and void legally. In other words, the meeting never happened as far as the law is concerned. The investigation revealed multiple examples where committees failed to have a quorum, yet they acted on a variety of proposed ordinances.

“Aldermen just voted themselves a pay raise a few years ago, arguing that their heavy work load justified the hike,” said BGA Executive Director Jay Stewart. Yet, when asked to fulfill one of the basic duties of a legislator – attend committee hearings – they regularly failed to earn their pay. To make matters worse,” Stewart added, “the committees often have staff and dedicated budgets, with taxpayers picking up the tab again. Chicago taxpayers are footing the bill for meetings that are literally worthless.”

OPEN RECORDS

The second investigation examined whether City Council committees were abiding by the Illinois Open Meetings Act (“OMA”). The OMA requires all public bodies to keep accurate written minutes of their meetings, including a “summary of discussion on all matters proposed, deliberated, or decided, and a record of any votes taken.” [5 ILCS 120/2.06] The purpose of the written minutes is to provide the public with a record of what happened at a meeting and how individuals voted.

Once again, the committees regularly failed to live up to their legal duties. Many committees had no written minutes at all, while some tried to substitute insufficient committee reports to the full City Council as minutes. The reports often fail to reflect any deliberations, testimony or a recorded roll call vote that indicates which aldermen were present and how they voted.

“In school, teachers tell students to ‘show their work’. Illinois law mandates it for these committees,” said Jay Stewart. “If they can tax us and spend our money, they should be able to give citizens the simple courtesy of providing an accurate record of their work. The Open Meetings Act requires it, and even simple common sense tells you it should be done.” Stewart said. “The next time an alderman complains how hard they work – just remember how they can’t be bothered with informing the public what they are doing, the few times they manage to show up for work.”

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