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Chicago-Kent establishes the Center for Open Government

CHICAGO—August 26, 2009—Chicago-Kent College of Law this week established the Center for Open Government (COG) to help ensure transparency, accountability and responsibility in local and state government. The Center will identify instances where legal recourse is needed to provide access to government information and proceedings.

The Center will focus in particular on cases challenging closed government processes under the Illinois Open Meetings Act, the Illinois Freedom of Information Act, and similar statutes. The Illinois Open Meetings Act grants citizen access to the meetings of many state and local governmental entities, while the Illinois Freedom of Information Act grants citizen access to a wide range of public documents and records.

The Center staff looks forward to working closely with the Better Government Association (BGA), the Citizen Advocacy Center, and other open-government advocates to support the litigation demands of various transparency initiatives.

The Center for Open Government will be housed in the Chicago-Kent Law Offices as part of the school's clinical education program. Under the supervision of faculty, students will interview and counsel clients, conduct factual investigation and legal research, develop case strategies, collect and analyze documents, and help in the litigation. No fees will be charged.

The Center has received significant seed funding from Clinton A. Krislov, a noted plaintiff's class-action attorney and a member of Chicago-Kent's adjunct faculty. Krislov is the founder and name/senior partner attorney of the Chicago firm Krislov & Associates, Ltd., and will serve as chairman of COG's advisory committee.

"I am grateful for the generosity of Clint Krislov, who has helped found this Center and who, through his commitment to open government, will inform and inspire our work," said Chicago-Kent Dean Harold J. Krent. "The formation of this Center responds to a wave of recognition by Attorney General Lisa Madigan and many others that the time is propitious for a sea change in how Illinois' governmental entities do business."

The Center will be directed by Terrance A. Norton, who served as a member of Chicago-Kent's clinical faculty for ten years and who has extensive experience in open government work, civil litigation and pro bono legal services.

"It is important for citizens to have both input and timely access to information on how government bodies conduct their business," said Norton. "The Center for Open Government will serve as an advocacy center by helping to make government more accessible to its citizens. Our work will help restore transparency and renew trust in government."

Norton worked for the BGA for more than a dozen years, serving for ten years as associate director and general counsel, and for two years as executive director. He also worked for the U.S. Justice Department as a special attorney in the criminal division's Organized Crime and Racketeering Section. In addition, he spent five years as a partner with Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP., where he oversaw the firm's national pro bono program.

Chicago-Kent College of Law is the law school of Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), a private, Ph.D.-granting institution. The Chicago-Kent Law Offices, the nation's first fee-generating law school clinic, has practice areas in employment discrimination and civil rights litigation, family law, health and disability law, immigration law, and criminal defense. The Law Offices also provides low-income taxpayer representation and mediation and alternative dispute resolution for which no fees are charged.