

# IVI-IPO 2012 COOK COUNTY BOARD OF REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE – Section 1

DATE: December 19, 2011

DISTRICT: Second

PARTY: Democratic

NAME: Michael M. Cabonargi

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CAMPAIGN MANAGER: James Thompson

NUMBER OF PETITION SIGNATURES FILED: 12,050

NUMBER REQUIRED: 4,000

A) Elective or appointive public or party offices previously held including dates.

**Commissioner, Second District, Cook County Board of Review: February 2011 - Present**

B) Other elective offices for which you have been a candidate.

**None.**

C) What is your primary occupation?

**My primary occupation is Commissioner of the Cook County Board of Review. I have no outside employment.**

D) Briefly list your civic activities of the past ten years.

**Please see the attached bio.**

E) What subjects have you studied and what experience have you had which will be most helpful to you in the office you seek?

**Please see the attached bio.**

F) What candidates have you supported in past elections? Please be specific in describing your role in each campaign.

**I have served as a volunteer for U.S. Senator Richard J. Durbin in his 1996, 2002 and 2008 campaigns; specifically, I worked on field (voter registration, door-to-door canvassing, GOTV, pollwatcher), research and election law. I served as an election lawyer in Gary, Indiana for President Barack Obama in November 2008. In addition, I have helped a number of federal, state and local candidates as a field volunteer, including President Clinton in 1992, and 1996, Vice President Al Gore in 2000 (co-chaired the Chicago chapter of GoreNet, the young professionals branch of the campaign), Senators John Edwards and John Kerry in 2004, Dan Hynes in 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008 (campaigns for Comptroller, Senate and then Governor).**

G) Please list all endorsements you have received so far.

**I have been endorsed by U.S. Senator Richard J. Durbin; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; Mayor Rahm Emanuel; Illinois Senate President John Cullerton; Speaker of the Illinois House Michael J. Madigan; Lieutenant Governor Sheila Simon; U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky; U.S. Congressman Michael Quigley; First District Commissioner, Cook County Board of Review Larry Rogers, Jr.; all the Cook County Commissioners and Chicago Aldermen in the Second District; and the Cook County Democratic Party.**

H) As concisely as possible, please state why you feel you should be endorsed over the other candidate(s). What goals for the office you seek are most important to you personally?

**I bring my experience and expertise analyzing and evaluating sophisticated financial transactions as a federal prosecutor of financial crimes, along with my lifelong commitment to integrity in public service, to provide a full, fair and impartial assessment of all real property located in Cook County.**

Prior to my appointment by Chief Judge Evans in February, I served as a senior attorney in the Division of Enforcement in the Chicago Regional Office of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). At the SEC, I investigated and prosecuted violations of the federal securities laws in the federal courts as well as the SEC's administrative proceedings. I brought a wide variety of complex cases, including prosecutions involving insider trading, accounting fraud, fraudulent offerings, pay-to-play, registration violations, and pyramid/Ponzi fraud schemes. The SEC's Commissioners recognized my hard work and commitment to the public. I received the Director's Award, for bringing the largest private offering fraud case filed by the Commission up to that time (\$2.8 billion), and the Chairman's Award for Excellence, for combating financial fraud targeting seniors.

My experience and success as a prosecutor carries over fully to the position of Commissioner on the Board of Review. A core part of my job at the SEC was reviewing and evaluating complicated financial transactions. The SEC provides me with a unique ability to analyze complex commercial properties and give fair appeal results while helping to ensure the utmost integrity in the process.

Furthermore, my work as a prosecutor was a continuation of my commitment to public service. As a first generation American, I learned the lesson that all children of immigrants learn: you have to earn your successes - always through hard work, often through sacrifice - and you have to give back to your community. My career has been built on acting as this responsible citizen. As an aide to U.S. Senators Paul Simon and Richard Durbin, a law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge Hibbler, as a prosecutor protecting people's rights and now as a Commissioner, I have demonstrated my passion and commitment to helping people.

My commitment to advocating for the rights of others extends beyond my work day. For example, while I clerked for Judge Hibbler, I saw that pro se plaintiffs often struggle with the court's rules and procedures. I volunteered to help establish a pro se help desk modeled on the successful pro se help desk in the Circuit Court of Cook County. I met with other Judges, Clerk's Office staff and representatives of local bar associations, and together we opened the first pro se help desk in the U.S. District Court in Chicago. For my leadership, the Federal Bar Association and the United States District Court awarded me the Award for Excellence in Public Interest Service. I have spent my life working for the public, and I understand the great responsibility that comes with the public's trust.

I am very proud of the work my staff and I have accomplished since I was sworn in as Commissioner on February 10, 2011:

**Bringing the Board to the Taxpayers.** Since my appointment in February, I have hosted more than 45 property tax seminars, partnering with elected officials, community groups, faith-based organizations, and organized labor throughout Cook County. These workshops have helped more than 3,500 homeowners file tax appeal forms.

**Increasing Access and Communication with the Board.** I have worked with leading community groups and introduced the first translations of the Board's appeal forms into Spanish, Polish and Chinese languages.

**Leading the Board of Review into the 21st Century.** My fellow Commissioners and I introduced online filing for appeals, a breakthrough that dramatically modernized the way services are provided at the Board of Review. Online filing streamlines the appellate process, increases efficiency and cuts down on paper use and materials, dramatically reducing the Board's carbon footprint as we move away from paper forms in triplicate. This online filing program was created at no additional cost to the taxpayers in less than six months by the careful communication and collaboration between the offices of the Cook County President, the Assessor and the Board of Review. The modernization platform is the biggest change for the Board since its inception, but it is just the beginning. I am working with the Bureau of Technology and others to move the Board of Review to a paperless

work flow.

**Professionalizing the staff of the Board.** I have professionalized the office by hiring attorneys on my staff to serve as analysts and hearing officers for residential and commercial property appeals, updating the Board's ethics policies and implementing an in-house training program with coursework offered by the Illinois Department of Revenue and leading property appraisal organizations.

**Listening to and helping Small Businesses.** I am working with small business owners to make filing a property tax appeal easier and less costly - to allow them to reinvest this time and money back into their business and hopefully create more jobs.

I) What is your campaign budget? How much have you raised to date?

**I am committed to raising and spending what is necessary to win election to a full term in order to continue the excellent work my staff and I provide. I have raised to date approximately \$300,000.**

J) How many people are on your campaign staff? How many volunteers are on your list?

**I am fortunate to have the support of a large network of friends and family. I do not have a paid campaign staff at this time.**

**IVI-IPO 2012 COOK COUNTY BOARD OF REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE – Section 2**

1. Will you make this a full-time job? What other employment, if any, do you intend to hold?

**My primary occupation is Commissioner of the Cook County Board of Review. I have no outside employment.**

2. Will you accept or have you accepted campaign donations from current or potential suppliers, contractors or employees of this office?

**I have followed and will continue to follow all campaign finance laws and regulations.**

3. Will you accept or have you accepted contributions from attorneys, title insurers or property owners who do business with this office?

**I have followed and will continue to follow all campaign finance laws and regulations.**

4. Will you employ or have you employed staff in your office who hold other public sector employment concurrently?

**Mr. Sam Brown is a residential property analyst on my staff with more than 10 years of experience in property assessment. Mr. Brown also serves as a village trustee in Matteson.**

5. Will you employ or have you employed staff in your office who have either outside employment or contracts with entities which do business with the County?

**I am not aware of staff at the Board of Review who have either outside employment or contracts with entities which do business with the County.**

6. In what circumstances should the Board of Review contract for outside professional services and what criteria would you implement for letting contracts? Please comment on any existing abuses and how you would correct them.

**The Board of Review uses the professional services of Cook County government whenever possible, e.g., human resources and information technology. Working with the County's Bureau of Technology and the Assessor's Office, the Board of Review recently released an online complaint system, to allow taxpayers to appeal their assessment online and without the traditional paper forms. The Board of Review continues to work with the Bureau of Technology to upgrade and expand the system into a fully paperless work flow system and may have to work with an outside vendor to provide project management and software development services. If the Board of Review works with an outside vendor, then the Board will follow all procurement laws and regulations.**

7. Do you support Patronage in hiring and promoting public employees? **No.**

8. Do you support Affirmative Action? **Yes.**

9. How can the Board of Review act to increase assessments on undervalued properties?

**I work to provide a full, fair and impartial assessment of all real property located in Cook County.**

10. How will you ensure that all tax appeals are given equal consideration without regard to political and partisan concerns?

**I have professionalized the office by hiring attorneys on my staff to serve as analysts and hearing officers for residential and commercial property appeals, updating the Board's ethics policies and implementing an in-house training program with coursework offered by the Illinois Department of Revenue and leading property appraisal organizations.**

11. What programs do you support to inform property owners of their right to appeal their assessments?

**One of my first goals as Commissioner was to help increase the access and ultimately the use of the Board of Review by all property owners in Cook County. I immediately pursued three programs to accomplish this goal: bring the services of the Board from the county building to the neighborhoods and to the people, remove language as a barrier to service and update the appeals process so residents may use current technology to file an appeal.**

**Since my appointment in February, I have hosted more than 45 property tax seminars, partnering with elected officials, community groups, faith-based organizations, and organized labor throughout Cook County. These workshops have helped more than 3,500 homeowners file tax appeal forms.**

**I introduced the first translations of the Board's appeal forms into Spanish, Polish and Chinese languages.**

**My fellow Commissioners and I introduced online filing for appeals, a breakthrough that dramatically modernized the way services are provided at the Board of Review. Online filing streamlines the appellate process, increases efficiency and cuts down on paper use and materials, dramatically reducing the Board's carbon footprint as we move away from paper forms in triplicate. This online filing program was created at no additional cost to the taxpayers in less than six months by the careful communication and collaboration between the offices of the Cook County President, the Assessor and the Board of Review. The modernization platform is the biggest change for the Board since its inception, but it is just the beginning. I am working with the Bureau of Technology and others to move the Board of Review to a paperless work flow.**

12. Do you favor legislation requiring notification to governmental bodies of tax assessment appeals?

**I would need to review and analyze the language of such legislation before offering an opinion.**

13. How should the administration of the Board of Review be improved?

**As stated above, I have improved the administration of the Board by improving access for taxpayers, professionalizing the staff and using technology to improve service.**

14. Do you support creation of an Office of Taxpayer Advocate/Ombudsman reporting directly to the Cook County Board of Commissioners, to facilitate taxpayer requests for information and assistance by helping individuals navigate the numerous offices involved?

**I would need to review and analyze the language of such legislation before offering an opinion.**

15. What safeguards would you implement to prohibit employees from doing political work on county time?

**I am drafting the first ethics manual for the Board of Review, which will include all laws, regulations and rules concerning the code of conduct and standards required of all employees. All employees will receive a copy of the ethics manual and receive regular ethics training on topics such as the prohibition on engaging in private political work on public time.**