

Gilbert A. Cornfield

2005 Peggy Browning Fund Honoree



Gilbert A. Cornfield has spent his working life dedicated to advancing the rights of individuals to assert their voices collectively in the workplace and in the community. He is widely admired for his quiet guidance and wisdom, his integrity, his intellect and his tireless commitment to working men and woman.

Gil graduated from the University of Chicago, where he received both his B.A. and J.D. degrees and also completed all graduate courses in industrial and labor relations.

For most of his legal career, Gil represented a wide range of labor organizations in both the public and private sectors as a partner in the firm of Cornfield and Feldman. The membership of these organizations include teachers at all educational levels, state and local employees, communications workers, bakery workers, printers, and scenic artists to name a few.

Gil was instrumental in establishing the rights of public employees in Illinois to organize and bargain collectively. Early in his career he argued two cases before the Supreme Court of the United States, *Atkinson v. Sinclair* and *Sinclair v. Atkinson*, which established that a wildcat strike could not be enjoined and that employers could not sue individual union members or officers for damages from strike actions. Although the holding on injunctions was later overturned by the Supreme Court decision in *Boys Markets*, the protection from personal liability for concerted activity continues.

Gil's work has extended beyond the labor movement to community action. In 1972 he successfully represented a group of tenants evicted for nonpayment of rent. The Illinois Supreme Court decision in *Spring v. Little* established an implied warranty of habitability to residential rental property and allowed the same as an affirmative defense to an eviction action.

He was active in the Civil Rights movement in the 60's including acting as chair of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Chicago. He also has shared his knowledge and vision with others by lecturing and teaching on civil rights and labor relations topics.