It’s time to guarantee fundamental worker rights in Illinois

Let’s pass the Workers’ Rights Amendment!

Election Day 2022 may seem a long way off, but it’s not too early to learn about the choices you’ll be asked to make next November. For Illinois workers and our families, one of the most important decisions will be how to vote on the proposed Workers’ Rights Amendment. (Spoiler alert: The IFT urges you to vote YES!) Here’s what’s at stake.

If passed by Illinois voters next fall, the Workers’ Rights Amendment (WRA) - formally known as Senate Joint Resolution Constitutional Amendment 11 - would amend the Illinois Constitution to guarantee the fundamental rights of workers to unionize and collectively bargain. Put simply, the WRA would increase worker power.

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Returning to work safely - TOGETHER

I don’t need to remind any IFT member that the last year and a half has been tough in every way imaginable. Then a few months ago - just when we started to believe that things might return to some sort of “normal” - the Delta variant came along and shattered those hopes. In some ways, it feels like we are starting at square one and staring into another long, dark COVID tunnel.

Thankfully, that’s not entirely true. Vaccinations are helping to keep the numbers of severe illness and death from skyrocketing - so far. Unfortunately, far too many Americans remain unvaccinated and are at great risk. As I write this, case counts are still rising in Illinois and across the nation, and the unfortunate politicization around mask wearing and vaccinations continues.

As most of us return to in-person work and school this fall, we’re understandably nervous about what the future holds for ourselves, our families, and Illinois students and citizens. Please know this: Your safety remains the IFT’s top priority.

Throughout the pandemic, IFT leaders and staff have worked tirelessly to advocate for the well-being of our members and those you serve. You can rest assured that support will continue.

As part of our commitment to help every member return to in-person work safely, the IFT has created Support for COVID-19 - a web page of resources that I hope you’ll use to help protect yourself, your family, and your community.

On this page you’ll find:

- Vaccination information designed to bust myths and set the record straight
- Share graphics to help spread the word about the importance of getting vaccinated
- Resources to support your physical and mental health
- Learning resources for students, teachers, and parents
- And more!

You’ll also find the IFT COVID Tracker, an online tool you can use to report cases or unsafe conditions in your school or workplace. We urge you to utilize this tool to help the IFT stay alert to outbreaks across the state so we can effectively advocate for you and your colleagues.

In addition to vaccinations, the IFT strongly believes that a layered approach in our schools and workplaces is the best way to keep our communities safe. We know that keeping members armed with the latest information and scientific recommendations is a critical part of that approach.

Until this pandemic is over, our fight to protect one another will continue. Please visit ift.aft.org/covid for the resources you need to do your part.

Thoughts? Email me at emaildan@ift-aft.org.

Working TOGETHER, we will continue to help keep everyone safe and #IFTSTRONG!

Dick Manley
President

A physics teacher for 34 years at Lockport Township High School, Manley first served as the president of AFT Local 1291 before being elected president of AFT Local 604 at the local’s inception in 1976. He never looked back.

He spent his life advocating the cause of public education, unions, and his members. Through his efforts over more than four decades, AFT Local 604 grew to be the second largest union in the IFT with more than 12,000 members in 75 councils in 10 Illinois counties.

“Dick was tireless and tenacious about improving the lives of students, workers, and their families, said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “During his career, he negotiated hundreds of collective bargaining agreements, defended member rights, influenced public policy through political action, built strong alliances with other unions and organizations, and supported effective professional development programs for Local 604 members.”

“Dick’s contributions were felt at the state and national levels, too. He worked on behalf of all IFT members as an elected vice president on the IFT Executive Board and its Executive Committee for 48 years,” said AFT Local 604 President Bill Briggs. “For 18 years, Dick also served as an AFT vice president, chairing the AFT Defense Committee and ensuring that the voice of IFT members was heard at the highest levels of our union.”

In 2010, Dick received the IFT Lifetime Achievement Award at the union’s headquarters and was also renamed the “Richard Manley Executive Conference Room” to recognize his lifelong union leadership and countless achievements.

Dick was not only a devoted unionist, but he was a dear friend and mentor. Beneath his tough exterior was a heart of gold.

Bill Briggs
AFT Local 604 President

“I counted Dick as a friend and valuable mentor in leadership,” said Montgomery. “It’s really hard to overestimate his impact on our union.”

It is no exaggeration to say Dick Manley was a legend. Words cannot describe how much he will be missed, nor can they quantify the debt of gratitude we all owe him.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to Dick’s wife, Sue Massey, and his family at this difficult time, as well as to the members and staff of AFT Local 604. We thank you for sharing him with us all. He will never be forgotten.

Dick Manley

REMEMBERING OUR BROTHER,
Kicking off the eighth year of the AFT’s Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program, teams from IFT locals and councils statewide gathered in July to begin work on their plans to strengthen their unions in 2021 and beyond. The teams form the latest class of participants in the LEAD program, which has been engaging and supporting members in union-building work since 2014. 2021-22 LEAD participants include:

- Argo Summit Council of Teachers (Local 571)
- Champaign Federation of Teachers (Local 1925)
- Illinois Federation of Public Employees (Local 4408)
- North Suburban Teachers Union (Local 1274)
- Northwest Suburban Teachers Union (Local 1211)

This year, all LEAD teams are focusing on the same goal - building more antiracist, justice-centered unions. The IFT shares that goal at the state level.

“The sustainability of our union depends on our ability to build true solidarity among all working people,” said IFT President Dan Montgomery. “This requires members to commit to dismantling the “isms” that divide us and erode our collective power. The LEAD program is one way the IFT is directly assisting locals and councils with increasing member engagement and helping them focus on this critical work.”

During the first one-weekend LEAD session, teams spent time focusing on community-building and leadership development and examining antiracist content. Then they assessed their local, created a vision statement, and began to map out a campaign plan to achieve their antiracist goals. Their work will continue throughout the 2021-22 school year as each team implements its plan locally.

The IFT is an active partner in the teams’ efforts, providing staff support and resources throughout the process. In the months ahead, teams will also meet multiple times as a group to check in, share progress, and determine next steps for their local or council.

Participants understand that to achieve their antiracist, justice-centered goals, the work cannot be a “one-and-done” plan, but must become a true shift in mindset and action.

The LEAD program is already helping us work together in my local to learn ways that we can dismantle racist practices through antiracist work. I feel empowered to continue doing the work and be vocal in my community.

Kari Robles | Local 1211

We know that change can happen with the commitment of strong union advocates who have shared beliefs and values to fight against racism. With the training and support provided by LEAD, we’re better positioned to achieve that goal and make a powerful impact.

Veronica Aguirre | Local 4408

Help your union take the LEAD

Would your local, council, or chapter like to participate in a future session of the LEAD program? To start, leaders should collaborate with their IFT field service director. Your team does not have to be composed of all elected leaders. In fact, we encourage you to consider rank-and-file members, particularly Black and Brown members and those from other marginalized groups, to be part of your LEAD team. This helps to bring more members into union work and can help mobilize members into activists. It also helps develop future union leaders.

Visit ift-aft.org/professionaldevelopment or contact your IFT field service director for details.
IT’S TIME TO GUARANTEE FUNDAMENTAL WORKER RIGHTS IN ILLINOIS

How? The WRA would prevent Illinois from passing any state law or local ordinance “that interferes with, negates, or diminishes the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively over their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment and workplace safety.” That means the WRA would permanently ban the passage of any so-called “right-to-work” laws in our state, which are designed to reduce worker rights and benefit big corporations.

Thanks to the efforts of IFT members and other union workers over the years, Illinois currently has no “right-to-work” laws on the books. The 27 states that do have paid the price.

Research continually shows that “right-to-work” laws are bad economic policy. A May 2021 report from the Illinois Economic Policy Institute and the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign shows that “right-to-work” states lag behind in creating middle-class jobs and delivering economic growth. By contrast, Illinois workers earn higher wages, are more likely to have health insurance coverage, have higher rates of homeownership, and are more productive than their counterparts in “right-to-work” states. (These findings accounted for factors such as cost of living, occupation, race, gender, wages, and income.)

Voters and elected officials are learning lessons from states like West Virginia, whose governor has admitted that “right-to-work” laws failed in his state. Missouri voters overwhelmingly rejected “right-to-work” laws in 2018, recognizing that they do not lead to job creation and economic growth, as proponents falsely claim.

As we continue to address the economic issues created by the pandemic, now is the ideal time to amend the Illinois Constitution so that it advances the cause of working families and boosts the state’s economic recovery. The WRA will help do just that by ensuring that all workers have the pay, benefits, resources, and protections they deserve at a time they’re desperately needed.

Let’s help Illinois’ working women and men access good jobs and have a respected voice in their workplaces! In the months ahead, please watch your inbox and future issues of Union Link for more information and action alerts about how we can work together to pass the WRA in November 2022.

Critical Race Theory: What is it and why is everyone talking about it?

The Illinois Federation of Teachers has created an extensive primer on Critical Race Theory, available on our website and as a printable pdf. We encourage you to read and share ift-aft.org/crt to fully understand how and why Critical Race Theory is being used to attack teachers and school curricula in our country.

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)?

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a framework that emerged from legal scholars of color over 40 years ago as they sought to understand the role race plays in the law and legal system. The basic tenet of CRT is that racism is more than individual prejudices and biases but also embedded within all our systems and institutions. Therefore, the racial inequities that we see in every system are not abnormalities, but the results of the normal, everyday workings of racism. It is not a “class” or curriculum taught in K-12 schools.

WHY IS IT SUCH A HOT TOPIC?

Following the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the racial disparities that were brought into focus during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism was thrust into the mainstream discourse. CRT provides a framework to understand and dismantle systemic racism. But there are those who want to game it and use it as a tool in the culture wars for political purposes; that is, some have misconstrued it to make Americans afraid of dealing with the subject of race in any context.

WHO IS SPEARHEADING THE ATTACK ON CRT?

The same wealthy, right-wing individuals and organizations who continually seek to weaken unions, defund education, and lobby for anti-worker policies: the Heritage Foundation, the Koch Family Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the Fordham and Manhattan Institutes, to name a few.

WHAT IS IFT’S POSITION?

IFT is committed to supporting high-quality education that is honest, antiracist, and culturally relevant. We engage students in learning that presents facts, truth, and multiple perspectives so that they learn to interrogate issues critically and empathically. To intentionally omit certain stories in order to paint a misleading, inaccurate picture of America is indoctrination, not education. We must equip students with the critical thinking necessary to analyze history and the present so that we can create a better future.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten has stated publicly that the AFT will support any teacher who is punished for teaching honest history.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

Please email us at info@ift-aft.org if you have further questions about Critical Race Theory or to access learning opportunities and/or resources on antiracism for your union.

Visit ift-aft.org/crt to learn about Critical Race Theory and download IFT’s CRT primer.

To learn about the value of collective voice, visit ift-aft.org/iftstrong.
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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
Visit ift-aft.org/professionaldevelopment for upcoming courses, trainings, and webinars.

PREVENTION
PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM INFECTION

- VACCINATE
  Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19.

- SOCIAL DISTANCE
  Stay at least 6ft from other people.

- WASH HANDS
  Wash your hands often with soap & water for at least 20 seconds.

- AVOID CLOSE CONTACT
  Avoid contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.

- WEAR A MASK
  When in public, wear a cloth mask over your nose & mouth.

- CLEAN SHARED SURFACES
  Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

- AVOID CROWDS
  Avoid large crowds of people and crowded spaces.

- STAY AT HOME
  Stay at home when sick, except to get medical care.