

## Your voice counts

**Advocating for our members is the IFT's top priority.** That's why we work to elect legislators in Springfield and Washington, D.C., who will stand up for the best interests of our members, our professions, and those we serve.

## How IFT helps you protect your financial future

As your union, the IFT is your partner and advocate from your first day on the job until the day you retire – and beyond. By providing you with pension information and resources like the *Retiring Wisely* online guide, the IFT gives you the tools you need to make important decisions about your retirement.

The guide is designed for active employees considering retirement under one of the following pension systems in which IFT members participate:

- **Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF)**  
for state public employees
- **State Employees Retirement System (SERS)**  
for state government workers
- **State Universities Retirement System (SURS)**  
for college and university educators
- **Teachers Retirement System (TRS)**  
for all PreK-12 teachers outside of Chicago

Staying informed and planning ahead for your retirement is more important than ever. Over the last few decades, lawmakers in Springfield shorted or skipped the state's required payments of these pension systems, causing them to be underfunded and putting your pension at risk.

Many attempts have been made to cut your benefits as a fix for the problem they caused, but thanks to the activism of our members, we have successfully staved off these threats. In 2015, the IFT and our labor partners filed suit and won a major victory for members when the Illinois Supreme Court declared pension-slashing Senate Bill 1 unconstitutional.

The IFT continuously monitors the state pension systems, reviews proposals that may affect your financial future, and works with lawmakers in both parties to seek fair and legal solutions to Illinois' fiscal challenges.

**But YOU are the key!** Take advantage of the resources provided by the IFT to stay informed and engaged as you plan for your retirement. Then be prepared to hold your elected officials accountable for their decisions by speaking up and taking action!

#IFTSTRONG



Illinois Federation of Teachers  
*A Union of Professionals*

ift-aft.org

When members come together with one powerful voice, we positively impact our professions and our communities.

# What is a union?

**Simply put, a union is a group of workers who come together to advance their common interests with collective power.** A union is not an outside organization or a third party; it is a democratic organization run by its members who make decisions and set direction on their own behalf.

Over many years, the collective action of union members has had a substantial impact on wages, benefits, equality, and workplace protections. In fact, unions have played a pivotal role in securing important gains that benefit everyone, though we may take them for granted.

So whether or not you're a member, unions have played an instrumental role in fighting on your behalf!

Strong unions mean strong communities because unions help all workers, not just their members, earn higher wages. For example, an average worker in a "right-to-work" state makes about \$6,000 less per year than he or she would in a free bargaining state.

As the inequality gap between the very rich and very poor widens, unions today have become more important than ever for middle-class families. And by promoting equal pay for equal work, unions help reduce inequalities and close the wage gaps faced by women and people of color.

Unions also help protect members' rights and voice in the workplace, as well as the ability to advocate for those they serve.

## Why are unions important?

### A POWERFUL VOICE ON THE JOB

Union workers have the right to negotiate with their employer over things like wages, benefits, and working conditions. Together, you have more power as a united group than you would as individuals, whether at the bargaining table or a public forum. Union members use their powerful voice to advocate for important issues like smaller class sizes, academic freedom, safe schools and workplaces, and other matters that have a positive impact on education, public services, and our communities.

### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Beyond your local union, you have the backing of 100,000 members in 200+ locals across Illinois, 1.5 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, and more than 10 million members of the AFL-CIO nationally. As one of the largest labor unions in Illinois, IFT has strength in numbers and a history of affecting positive change from the workplace to the Capitol.

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

IFT supports you through this process by which working people negotiate and secure fair contracts with their employers. IFT has helped thousands of members secure economic gains and other improvements for themselves and those they serve.

### A CONTRACT

You have a say. IFT members elect their bargaining team, negotiate terms, and democratically vote to approve their collective bargaining agreements (contracts), which provide fair wages, benefits, work rules, and job security. Once bargained, you and your colleagues vote on the resulting employment contract, providing the structure for a positive workplace environment.

### PROTECTION & SUPPORT

The IFT is an experienced partner at the bargaining table and works with members to win both economic gains and other improvements for our locals. But the union does more than help to bargain the agreement. We also help ensure that the terms of that contract are enforced. The IFT provides support to help protect you against employer discrimination, questionable behavior, unfair labor practices, and more. If your employer does violate the contract, the IFT provides assistance to resolve the problem if needed.

### PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

IFT provides professional development training to enhance members' workplace and leadership skills. Through the union's popular Union Leadership Institute program and other opportunities, IFT members have access to hands-on training at convenient locations around the state on topics ranging from community and political engagement to collective bargaining.

### LOBBYING AND POLITICAL ACTION

IFT empowers you to make your voice heard by legislators on key issues that impact members, education, and public services. Our experienced team tracks legislation, keeps you informed, and arms you with the resources you need to influence public policy.

### CONSUMER BENEFITS

IFT and AFT offer members savings on a wide range of consumer benefits and services, as well as scholarship programs to help members, their children, and their students pursue higher education and career advancement opportunities.

### RACIAL JUSTICE ADVANCEMENT



### UNION DIFFERENCE FACTS

On average, **union members** earn **27% more** than their non-union counterparts.

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I support the union because I want every improviser to feel safe, empowered, and nurtured in their creative homes. We can achieve this by remaining in constant, formal, and brave conversation with the community at large.

*Sheri Flanders*  
Association of International Comedy Educators

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When people attack unions, they are attacking democracy in action. I can't just stand by and not speak out against that.

*Pankaj Sharma*  
North Suburban Teachers Union, Local 1274

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It's really important that districts are working with their staff and community to see what they need. Safety needs to be the number one priority.

*Rachel Esposito*  
IFT Local 571

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The IFT gives us strength in numbers to not only bargain fair contracts, but to stand up for our interests in Springfield. Our union is our advocate.

*Kim Hayward*  
General Service Employees Union, Local 382