



NEA

RETIRED

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**STAND UP!
SPEAK OUT!**

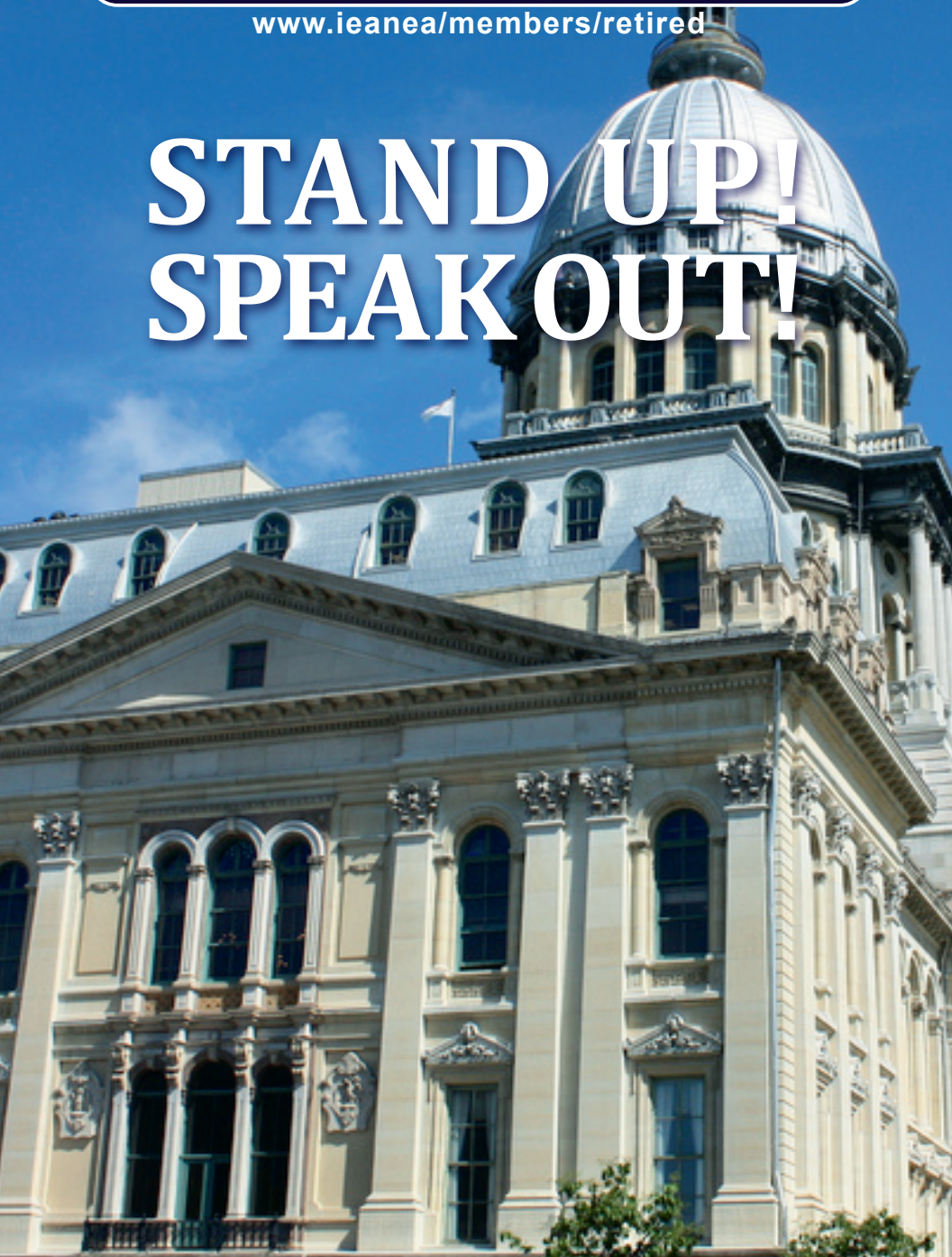


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STAND UP! SPEAK OUT!

Even though we are retired, we *must* continue to be advocates for issues that impact teachers, retirees, and public education. Many members of IEA and IEA-Retired believe we shouldn't even be involved in politics. I strongly disagree! I learned a long time ago that *every* decision that impacts public education, educators, and retired educators is made by an elected official—or someone hired by an elected official. Think about that: from what kind of paper will be used in the classroom, to curriculum, to student discipline codes, to teachers' schedules, to teacher evaluations plans, to teacher salaries, to pension benefits, to healthcare benefits, and so on—every decision is made by an elected official or someone hired by an elected official.



That is why it is so important to be involved in electing people who have the best interests of students, teachers, and public education at heart. We must then be involved in talking to these elected officials—telling them our stories about how we have been or will be affected by legislation. We must be effective advocates for the issues that are important to us.

This booklet is meant to be a resource for you as you participate in the advocacy experience. Every day you have the opportunity to influence decisions that are being made on issues that matter to you and to people you care about.

STAND UP! SPEAK OUT! BE AN ADVOCATE!

Janet Kilgus
Chair, IEA-Retired Council
May, 2016

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

Be an advocate for IEA-Retired!

A guide to contacting elected officials



Concerned about pensions, insurance or other issues? You can make a difference!

Hearing personal stories makes issues clear to policymakers. Your personal story is powerful. It can make an elected official aware of how people are affected by government programs and policies. This guide offers tips and resources for making your voice heard.

Why speak out?

- ▶ You are the expert. You know how elected officials' decisions affect real people.
- ▶ You are in control. You can make a telephone call, send an email, write a letter, or go to the Capitol.
- ▶ You will be listened to. Public officials work for you and will make time for you.
- ▶ Advocates do not need training. You have experience, knowledge, and concerns to share.
- ▶ You do not have to go to Springfield; you can advocate from home.
- ▶ **Advocacy matters.** Silence tells officials that you agree with them or have no interest!



Two essentials for effective advocacy

- ▶ **Build relationships:** Get to know your elected officials and help them know and understand your issues and concerns. You are a more effective advocate when your legislator knows who you are. Invite them to a local retired chapter meeting. Volunteer for their campaign. Walk in a parade for them. Attend fundraisers. Check with officials' offices to see if they sponsor any local events where you can talk about your concerns.
- ▶ **Assure credibility; build trust and respect:** Always be sure that an elected official gets accurate information. Talk only about what you know. If an official has questions, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." You can offer to try to find the answers and get back to them.

Before you contact a legislator

- ▶ Make sure you have accurate information. Go to the IEA website and under the "Legislative" tab, click on Fact Sheets www.ieane.org/legislative/iea-fact-sheets/ and/or Capitol Bill Watch www.ieane.org/legislative/capitol-watch/ to gather information and talking points.
- ▶ If it's a federal issue, go to the NEA website issues and action to gather information and talking points: www.nea.org/home/IssuesAndAction.html.



Whom can I contact and how can I connect with them?

Federal and State Legislators' names

- ▶ For members of the Illinois General Assembly, office addresses and phone numbers may be found under il.gov.
- ▶ If you don't know who your legislator is, check out the IEA's webpage. Under the "Legislative" tab, click "Contact Your Legislator," enter your address and your local legislator name(s) will appear. Click here: www.ieanea.org/legislative/contact-your-legislators/. You can also call the County Clerk's office and provide your address for this information.
- ▶ Check www.contactingthecongress.org to get contact information on your senators and representatives in Washington.

The Governor's Office

- ▶ Visit the governor's website at www.illinois.gov/gov/contactus/Pages/default.aspx for contact information.
- ▶ Call 217-782-0244



How can I learn about issues before the state legislature?

- ▶ Stay in touch with your lobbyist.
- ▶ Visit the IEA webpage: **www.ieanea.org/**.
- ▶ Read Legislative Updates and watch videos. Sign up for the *"IEA-Retired insider."*
- ▶ Contact your region's Grassroots Political Activist (GPA) and let them know you want to be involved in local activities. Your GPA can help you locate current information on your issues.
- ▶ Talk to your UD, who can provide you with the GPA's contact information.
- ▶ Contact an IEA-Retired Representative to NEA for information at the Federal level.
- ▶ Go to the NEA website and look at the issues and action tab/legislative center. Sign up for NEA Today Express, Lily's Blackboard, etc. Become informed.
- ▶ Follow IEA and NEA on social media.



Getting started

Think about what it is that you want and the best way to explain it. Be brief, focused and clear. Even if you're telling a personal story, it's important to be careful about what you say and how you say it. You want to be sure you make your point, and that it is heard and understood.

Calling or meeting with an elected official

Legislators are very interested in hearing from their constituents. Part of their job is to respond to you. Often when you phone an elected official, an assistant will take your call, but your message will get to the official. If you want to talk to the legislator personally, just say so. Some tips:

1. Before you contact an official:

- ▶ Gather your thoughts on paper. This will help you stay on target and get your message across.
- ▶ Think about how you might respond to questions posed by the official.
- ▶ Know your official's background (for example, committee assignments, district, his/her voting record). If you need help, call IEA 1-800-252-8076 and ask to speak with someone in Government Relations.



2. Introduce Yourself:

- ▶ State your name and where you live.
- ▶ Give your phone number and/or email address so that they can contact you.
- ▶ Tell them that you are a registered voter, and a constituent of their district.
- ▶ Let them know that you are a member of IEA-NEA. That helps them to understand that you are member of an organization that represents a large number of people.

3. Identify the Issue:

- ▶ Explain the situation about which you are calling and provide the bill number if appropriate.
- ▶ Tell your personal experience clearly and concisely.
- ▶ Describe the impact that the issue may have (*give specific examples if possible*).

4. Say exactly what you want the legislator to do:

- ▶ Propose a bill.
- ▶ Support a bill.



- ▶ Oppose a bill.
- ▶ Change a bill.
- ▶ Be able to provide specific examples of how you want the official to act.

5. Listen carefully:

- ▶ Listen and take notes on what an official or assistant says.
- ▶ Feel free to ask questions if you don't understand something.

6. Keep the conversation focused on the subject:

- ▶ Use your notes to check off the points you want to make.
- ▶ Steer the legislator back to the subject you want to discuss, if necessary.

7. Follow up on your call or meeting:

- ▶ Establish a good rapport with your legislator by speaking in a respectful, non-confrontational manner. This will help to build your relationship with the legislator.
- ▶ Let your legislator know you would like to be a resource to them on issues pertaining to education and retired educators.
- ▶ Send a thank you note to the official, reminding them of the content of the conversation.



- Stay in touch with them by providing them with additional information, follow-up calls or emails, and possibly additional meetings.

Let them know you are watching

Whenever you talk with elected officials, tell them that you will be watching to see what happens and how they vote on issues. Write short notes or call and let them know when you approve or disapprove of their actions. **Hold them accountable.** In addition, be sure to thank them for their support when it's appropriate. It is helpful in building your relationship with your legislator if you don't only approach them when you are asking for something. Acknowledge their support.

The Legislative Office Building and State Capitol

Lobbying in Springfield is certainly an option, although we have found that "at-home" lobbying has a greater impact. If you choose to come to Springfield, you will have an opportunity to enhance IEA's visibility by possibly attending a committee hearing thereby indicating a "record of appearance" at said hearing. Realize that the percentage of bills *introduced* with no hearing as opposed to bills introduced with formal committee attention is extremely high. Yes, a lot of bills are consigned to oblivion. The IEA-Retired Legislative Action Committee believes we



should still make an effort to attend ***committee hearings***, where we can help promote IEA's visibility and presence.

If you choose to lobby in Springfield, here is what you need to know:

Legislators are housed in the Stratton Office Building and in the Capitol itself. A visitor's lot provides parking. Please bring identification with you as you may or may not need it for the security checkpoints.

Do not come to Springfield unless you first check with your IEA lobbyist. Session days are frequently cancelled, as are committee hearings, and sometimes the cancellation happens at the last minute.

Got an opinion? Share it in a Letter to the Editor!

This is the most widely read section of the newspaper. Use it!

To increase the chances of your letter getting published follow these guidelines:

- ▶ If possible, write about something that recently ran in the publication.
- ▶ Keep it relevant. Newspapers will only publish letters on issues of current concern.



- ▶ Limit your letter to two hundred words or less. Longer letters will not be published or will be severely edited. Use short sentences and short paragraphs.
- ▶ Include your name, home address, phone numbers and email address. Editors will contact you to verify that you sent the letter.
- ▶ Avoid personal attacks.
- ▶ Send the letter to different papers but be sure to sign it. Newspapers will not publish unsigned letters.
- ▶ Many newspapers have links on their web pages to submit letters directly to the editor. If you have access to a computer, you can go to your local paper's website and submit electronically.

Form for a Letter to the Editor:

- ▶ Refer to the issue and state your position on it.
- ▶ Expand on the issue and the reasons for your position. Use anecdotes, quotations, statistics, and any other information that support your point of view.
- ▶ Conclude and restate your major point.



Note: Most newspapers provide guidelines for letters to the editor. Many publish them, or provide an email or telephone contact.

IEA-Retired On Legislative Go Teams

- ▶ Work with regions in assigned IEA office on political activities and actions.
- ▶ Find retired volunteers for the region Go Team.
- ▶ Find retired members to apply to become a GPA, as needed when there is a vacancy.
- ▶ Participate in local recommendation meetings. (Make sure that the president/designee and all participants are current IPACE contributors.)
- ▶ Inclusion on the Go Team means you can join together with other actives and retired from your geographical area. Formal training for Go Team members is provided in late January/early February in Springfield. Costs are covered for this event. Contact your region GPA for more information.

IEA-Retired Legislative Action Committee

The IEA-Retired Legislative Action Committee is made up of approximately 10 members from across the state, who have expressed an inter-



est in political action. Many attended the IEA-Retired SLA training around creating retired activists and organizing around political action; many of the committee members are former GPAs and region Go Team members.

This committee is available to assist retired chapters and their members to be more informed and to enhance our retired members' political activism. If you are interested in learning more about this committee, please contact Diane Chapman, Chair, IEA-Retired Legislative Action Committee (dianchap@att.net).

The charge of the IEA-Retired Legislative Action Committee:

- ▶ Brainstorm at face-to-face meeting to prepare/update a legislative action toolkit of possible legislative activities and actions for chapters and members to consider.
- ▶ Divide up the chapters to be direct contacts to two or three chapter presidents and to share information on issues and crises when needed.
- ▶ Assist with the NEA-Retired Political Grant as needed by Kim Riley, IEA staff.
- ▶ Participate in conference calls as needed.



- ▶ Assist with sample letters to the editor and/or communications to politicians on issues as needed to help members in their communications.
- ▶ Work through/with IEA Government Relations and keep them informed about anything this committee and its members are doing.

Encourage Retired Chapter leaders to have:

- ▶ Retired chapter representative at all region council meetings to report to the region and back to the chapter.
- ▶ Retired volunteers on the region Go Team.
- ▶ Member participation in region activities including political activities such as lobbying, parades, meetings with legislators, rallies and more.
- ▶ Communication loops established with region leaders, staff, and region GPA.

Legislative action toolkit for retired chapters and members

The following is a list of suggestions, in no particular order, to consider for becoming more legislatively and politically informed and involved. Pick what works for and interests you, your members, and colleagues.

- ▶ Establish a relationship and communicate with the region leaders and staff in assigned region IEA office.
- ▶ Have presidents of local IEA retired chapters send representatives to region council meetings to report to the region and back to the chapter.
- ▶ Prepare a directory of area state and federal legislators, as well as state elected officials, so all members have easy access to contact information of politicians they may need to contact.
- ▶ Create a directory of individual members, which matches them with their legislators.
- ▶ Have a chapter legislative chair who keeps members informed and who coordinates with region councils and UD's.
- ▶ Work with assigned UD's and GPAs as a resource. (*Ask them to come to an IEA-Retired local meeting to share and discuss issues with the members.*)
- ▶ Keep members in the information loop by creating an email distribution system to pass on information from IEA and the IEA-Retired Chair in a timely manner. (*Use a buddy system for those without email.*)
- ▶ Rally chapter members to participate in calls to action using IEA-NEA provided talking points and directions.
- ▶ Have pre-printed postcards with a message on a current issue at your chapter meeting for members to sign and address to their legislators.
- ▶ Build fun into legislative activities and events to generate interest within the membership.

- ▶ Plan activities which include political diversity to reach all members and their political preferences, i.e., activities about issues which impact educators and their common needs, as opposed to issues based on political party lines (*Republican/Democrats*).
- ▶ Encourage reluctant members to begin their political action by finding one legislator they are comfortable supporting.
- ▶ Promote IPACE contributions (*The form is on IEA-Retired website: www.ieanea.org/media/2014/05/IPACE-VOLUNTARY-PAY-ROLL-FIXED-OPT.pdf*).
- ▶ Visit the IEA website—"Legislative" tab—often to stay informed and for resource materials www.ieanea.org and www.ieanea.org/legislative/.
- ▶ Ask members to visit the above website to print out fact sheets, so they are better informed and can share correct information with others.
- ▶ Visit the IEA-Retired website at www.ieanea.org/retired often for information specific to IEA-Retired. (*This information includes forms, contact info, and more.*)
- ▶ Participate in Labor Day and other parades, rallies, etc., with signs/shirts to promote IEA, IEA-Retired, and unions. (*Work with regions and locals to achieve this goal.*)
- ▶ Encourage retired leaders and members to set up Google Searches on legislative, education, and pension issues to be more globally informed, see what others are saying, and to help correct incorrect information with our members and the public. (*If help is needed to set up Google Searches, please ask IEA-Retired staff contact, Kim Riley at kim.riley@ieanea.org*.)
- ▶ Write letters, emails, and make calls to legislators. (*Letters and calls are better than emails.*)
- ▶ Visit legislators' offices back home and pick two or three issues to discuss. (*See website for talking issues and talking points.*)
- ▶ Invite legislators to an IEA-Retired local chapter meeting to discuss current issues.

- ▶ Host legislative breakfasts, dinners, or receptions with area legislators for members. (*Work with regions, locals, and GPAs in assigned office.*)
- ▶ If your chapter has enough contributors, request an IPACE rebate to fund an activity or event.
- ▶ Assist locals in need by attending school board meetings to show support and help “pack the place.”
- ▶ Participate in lobbying in Springfield.
- ▶ Ask an IEA lobbyist to come to a local meeting to update the members on legislative issues.
- ▶ Like and share IEA posts on Facebook and Twitter and encourage members to share these posts.
- ▶ Set up a chapter website, Facebook page, and/or Twitter accounts to help get out our message and to communicate our message with our “friends.”
- ▶ Promote the IEA app for smart phones as another way to stay informed.
- ▶ Be involved in campaigns of IEA recommended candidates.
- ▶ Help our members understand what classrooms and teaching are like today, so they can better support educational issues facing our active members. (*Ask an active educator or new retiree to share at a meeting.*)
- ▶ Seek new retired educators to join and be active in the local IEA-Retired chapter, so they can be the voice of what is happening in the classroom now, since many of the members of the local may have been retired and out of the classroom for a number of years.
- ▶ Support striking locals in your surrounding area. (*This support can include taking food, walking the picket line, sending letters/email of support, and providing help as needed.*)



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