

PRIORITY BILLS BEFORE THE ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LWV Mission: Empowering voters and defending a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

SB1181 – Public Expression Protections (Senator Stadelman/Rep. Didech)

The goal of this bill is to safeguard constitutional rights of petition, speech, and association while maintaining a balance with legitimate legal claims. This bill *amends the Citizen Participation Act* to strengthen protections for free speech and press activities, particularly in cases involving Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

- Expands the definition of government participation to explicitly include press reporting and investigating matters of public concern.
- Clarifies that legal claims do not need to solely involve constitutional rights to be covered by the Act.
- Introduces a comprehensive stay provision that automatically halts legal proceedings when a motion is filed under the Act. The stay provisions are designed to prevent costly and time-consuming legal actions that might discourage public participation.

SB1988 - College Press as Public Media (Senator Koehler/Rep. Chung)

This legislation aims to protect press freedom and editorial independence for both student and public media produced within state-sponsored higher education institutions in Illinois by amending *the College Campus Press Act*.

- Expands press freedom protections to public media produced at state-sponsored higher education institutions.
- Introduces a new definition for "public media produced at a State-sponsored institution of higher learning," Applies to media created and distributed by an entity with public funding and a license to use the institution's resources.
- Establishes that such public media is a public forum for expression by its employees, including journalists and editors, and cannot be subject to prior review by institutional officials.
- Allows employees or agents of public media entities to file civil actions if their press freedoms are violated.

Prohibit Denial of a Free Public Education (Jiménez)

The legislation draws upon the landmark 1982 Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe*, which established that children cannot be denied education based on immigration status, and aims to create a safe and welcoming school environment for all students. *Amends the School Code*.

- Prohibits a child from being denied a free public education through secondary school while in the State based on the child's or associated person's perceived or actual citizenship or immigration status.
- Prohibits a school from excluding a child from participation in, or denying a child the benefits of any program or activity, on the grounds of that child's actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status.
- Further provides that a school must not allow an immigration agent to enter a school site or school district facility for any purpose without providing valid identification, a written statement of purpose, and a valid judicial warrant.
- Requires a school district or school to adopt a policy for complying with the amendatory Act.

PRIORITY BILLS BEFORE THE ILLINOIS SENATE

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HB3363 – Public Defender Act (aka FAIR Act) (Rep. Vella /Senator Peters)

The legislation aims to improve the quality and consistency of public defense across Illinois for individuals who cannot afford counsel by creating more standardized systems, increasing transparency, and providing additional support for public defenders at both the state and county levels.

- Creates the independent State Public Defender Commission within the judicial branch and a State Public Defender position. Provides that the State Public Defender Commission will have broad responsibilities including providing resources to county public defender offices, establishing training programs, and advocating for adequate court system funding.
- Avoids real or perceived conflicts of interest in carrying out justice by moving the responsibility for appointing a Public Defender for unrepresented persons to the court rather than appointments being made by the judge who presides over the trial.
- Mandates the creation of performance metrics to assess indigent defense services and ensure compliance with constitutional requirements, including collecting detailed data about public defender offices, caseloads, staffing, and resources.

HB2545 - Supportive Housing Project Appeals (Rep. Guzzardi / Senator A. Johnson)

This bill amends the Affordable Housing Planning and Appeals Act and aims to make it easier to develop housing for low-income individuals with disabilities by providing a more streamlined appeals process when local municipalities initially reject such projects.

- Expands the parties who can appeal to include: housing developers, potential residents, service providers, and community or advocacy groups
- Give the State Housing Appeals Board the authority to:
 1. automatically reverse the municipality's decision to deny the proposed supportive housing project if a municipality fails to respond to an appeal within 60 days, and
 2. if the municipality does timely reply, reverse the municipality's decision to deny the proposed supportive housing project if the Board determines that the municipality has not demonstrated one of the following: clear and convincing evidence that the proposed supportive housing project would be detrimental to the fair operation and interest of the municipality, or that the project would place an unreasonable and disproportionate financial burden on the municipality or on municipal services.

FOR ILLINOIS SENATE CONSIDERATION

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Prohibit Denial of a Free Public Education (Jiménez)

(This bill has not yet passed the House)

The legislation draws upon the landmark 1982 Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe*, which established that children cannot be denied education based on immigration status, and aims to create a safe and welcoming school environment for all students. *Amends the School Code.*

- Prohibits a child from being denied a free public education through secondary school while in the State based on the child's or associated person's perceived or actual citizenship or immigration status.
- Prohibits a school from excluding a child from participation in, or denying a child the benefits of any program or activity, on the grounds of that child's actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status.
- Further provides that a school must not allow an immigration agent to enter a school site or school district facility for any purpose without providing valid identification, a written statement of purpose, and a valid judicial warrant
- Requires a school district or school to adopt and comply with a policy for complying with the amendatory Act.