

ILLINOIS

Illinois Bans Coerced Employee Participation in Political or Religious Meetings

On July 31, 2024, Illinois enacted the [Worker Freedom of Speech Act](#). This law protects workers from punishment or retaliation for refusing to attend meetings or listen to their employer's speech on religious or political matters, including speech regarding labor unions. The new law takes effect on **Jan. 1, 2025**.

Overview of the New Law

Under the new law, employers may not discharge, discipline or otherwise penalize, threaten to discharge, discipline, or otherwise penalize or take any adverse employment action against an employee:

- Because the employee declines to or as a means of requiring an employee to:
 - Attend or participate in employer-sponsored meetings that communicate the employer's views on religious or political matters; or
 - Receive or participate in employer communications that communicate the employer's views on religious or political matters; or
- Because the employee makes a good-faith report of a violation or suspected violation of the law.

Notice Requirement

Within 30 days of the law's effective date, employers must post a notice of employee rights under the law in a location where employee notices are customarily posted.

Exceptions

The new law includes the following exceptions:

- Employers may offer voluntary meetings or other communications regarding religious or political matters;
- Employers may communicate the information that they are legally required to communicate or that is necessary for the employees to perform their jobs;

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Important Definitions

"Political matters" are matters relating to political elections, political parties, proposals to change legislation, regulations or public policy, and the decision to join or support any political party or political, civic, community, fraternal or labor organization.

"Religious matters" are matters relating to religious belief, affiliation or practice, or the decision to support or join any religious organization or association.

Effective Jan. 1, 2025, Illinois employers may not require participation in political or religious meetings.

- Employers may require employees to attend trainings intended to foster a civil and collaborative workplace or reduce or prevent workplace harassment or discrimination;
- Institutions of higher education may conduct meetings or communicate with employees regarding coursework, symposia, research, publication or an academic program at the institution;
- State or local legislative or regulatory bodies may require employees to attend meetings or participate in communications regarding the employer's proposals to change legislation, regulations or public policy;
- Political organizations, political party organizations, caucus organizations, candidates' political organizations or not-for-profit tax-exempt organizations may require employees to attend meetings or participate in communications regarding the employer's political tenets or purposes; and
- Religious organizations may require employees to attend meetings or participate in communications regarding the employer's religious beliefs, practices or tenets.

Enforcement and Penalties

The law provides that employees and interested parties (i.e., organizations that monitor employer compliance with various state employment laws) alleging violations of the law may bring a civil action for penalties. Employers that violate the law may be subject to all appropriate relief, including injunctive relief, reinstatement, back pay, reestablishment of employee benefits, and attorney fees and costs. Employers may also be required to pay a civil penalty of \$1,000 per violation to the Illinois Department of Labor.

Next Steps for Employers

To ensure compliance with the new law, employers may consider reviewing formal and informal meeting and communication practices and preparing a notice of employee rights under the law. Employers may also consider training supervisors on their obligations and restrictions with respect to political and religious speech.