

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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103rd General Assembly Brings New Faces, New Opportunities

The November general election brings many new lawmakers to Springfield. While this is true of any election, the freshman legislators elected in November 2022 build on trends including the growing Democratic influence in the Chicago suburbs and a younger and more diverse General Assembly. With thirty new or new-to-their-chamber legislators, State House types have a lot of names and faces to learn as lawmaking gets underway.

Fourteen new Democratic legislators were sworn in on January 11, 2023, along with nine new Republican members. New House Democratic members include: Harry Benton (97-Plainfield), Diane Blair-Sherlock (46-Villa Park), Mary Beth Canty (54-Arlington Heights), Sharon Chung (91-Bloomington), Laura Faver Dias (62-Grayslake), Matt Hanson (83-Aurora), Norma Hernandez (77-Melrose Park), Hoan Huynh (13-Chicago), Lilian Jimenez (4-Chicago), Gregg Johnson (72-East Moline), Jenn Ladisch (45-Elmhurst), Kevin Olickal (16-Skokie), Abdelnasser Rashid (21-Bridgeview), and Nabeela Syed (51-Palatine).

On the other side of the aisle, nine Republicans will join the House. John Cabello (90-Machesney Park) and Wayne Rosenthal (108-Morrisonville) will return to the House of Representatives in new districts after having served previously in the chamber. Additional new Republican representatives include Jed Davis (75-Newark), Bradley Fritts (74-Dixon), William Hauter (87-Morton), Jennifer Sanalidro (48-Hanover Park), Kevin Schmidt (114-Millstadt), Dennis Tipsword

(105-Metamora) and Travis Weaver (93-Edwards).

In the Senate, six new Democratic senators will be seated along with three new Republicans. New Democratic Senators are Javier Loera Cervantes (1-Chicago), Mike Porfirio (11-Bridgeview), Willie Preston (16-Chicago), and Rachel Ventura (43-Joliet). Mary Edly-Allen (31-Libertyville) previously served in the House, along with Michael Halpin (36-Rock Island). New Republican senators include Seth Lewis (24-Bartlett) and Andrew Chesney (45-Freeport) both who are moving to the Senate from the House, and Erica Harriss (56-Glen Carbon).

One trend the election highlighted is the growing number of Asian-American legislators. When she took office in 2017, Theresa Mah (D-Chicago) was the first Asian-American elected to the Illinois General Assembly representing the city's Chinatown neighborhood. Between the 2016 and 2022 election, three more Asian-Americans joined the Illinois House: Denyse Wang Stoneback, Janet Yang Rohr, Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, and South Asian American Ram Villivalam was elected to the Senate. Those lawmakers will be joined on January 11, 2023 by Sharon Chung, Hoan Huynh, Kevin Olickal and Nabeela Syed, bringing the Asian-American caucus to a total of eight members.

The new 103rd General Assembly will also see the first Muslim legislators to serve. Representatives Nabeela Syed and Abdelnasser Rashid will take office in January. While Syed is a member of the Asian-American Caucus, Rashid is a Palestinian-American. Syeed, along with Representative Bradley Fritts (R-Dixon)

also has the distinction of being the first members of "Generation Z" to serve in the General Assembly. At twenty-three years of age, Syeed and Fritts share a unique generational perspective despite their political differences.

When comparing the make-up of the 103rd General Assembly with that of the state, Latino or Hispanic residents and women are underrepresented. According to the 2020 census, residents who identify as Black are 14% of Illinois residents, and that identify as Latino or Hispanic are 18% of residents. Black lawmakers are about 18% of the House and Senate respectively, but Latino legislators are just 10% of their chambers. While the gender divide is slightly better in the Illinois Senate, women hold 42% of those seats, and 39% of House Seats. One positive development is the election of Representative Tony McCombie (R-Savanna) as the House Republican Leader. McCombie is the first woman to serve as a caucus leader in the Illinois House.

So, what does any of this have to do with fire protection districts? Quite a bit. The Illinois Legislature is an ever-evolving body. New members are elected, creating new opportunities to educate lawmakers about the priorities of the fire service. The task of relationship building is never finished, and it is important to acknowledge the generation and cultural perspectives that each legislator brings to Springfield in crafting our message. As always, we encourage members to look for ways to engage their representatives and senators and serve as a resource, particularly to our newest legislators as they navigate the complex legislative process. ■