

Legislative Interview Questions 2024

With Background

Transparent and Ethical Government

- ★ 1. You are likely aware that it has been some time since the legislature in Illinois has had an effective Legislative Inspector General. Do you favor legislation to institute an independent Legislator General? If so, what do you think it would accomplish?

BACKGROUND: Implementing a truly independent Legislative Inspector General provides the opportunity to advance ethics reforms and hold representatives accountable to their constituents. It also positions the General Assembly to demonstrate it is serious about restoring public faith in Illinois state government. Effective legislation would include the following elements:

- An independent reporting structure: The IG should not report directly or solely to the legislature or other political figures that may be the subject of a potential investigation.
- Protection of the budget: A funding floor protects an LIG from possible reprisals for pursuing unpopular investigations.
- Protection of the IG: The IG can only be removed for cause.
- Cooperation agreement: A stipulation that agencies or officials comply with requests, submit documents when asked and don't interfere with investigations. The ability to issue and enforce subpoenas and publish findings are critically
- Public Check and Balance: Placing members of the public on the Legislative Ethics Commission, which currently is composed only of legislators, would make the process more transparent and accountable to the public.

- ★ 2. Illinois courts are not currently subject to FOIA requests. We are one of only six states that don't require this of our courts. Do you think citizens should have a right to require Illinois courts to respond to FOIA requests as a way to monitor how and how well our courts are operating? Why / Why not?

BACKGROUND:

Unlike most other states, the IL judicial branch is not covered under FOIA statutes. This has contributed to lack of information to solve problems and has kept disturbing information about detention centers, particularly for juveniles, from the public eye.

Each year, millions of cases go through the Illinois court system. The judicial branch's influence extends far beyond the courtroom. Illinois courts oversee probation, pretrial, and administrative functions, at significant taxpayer expense. It makes sense, then, that the people of Illinois have access to the inner workings of the Illinois courts under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act, from which the judicial branch is currently exempt.

Illinois courts, mandated to begin collecting data on the SAFE-T Act on July 1, 2022, have had a late start with data collection, with most counties only starting on September 18, 2023. Further requests for data either from before September 18, or outside of the limited scope of what is being collected, are not possible, because the judicial branch lacks the infrastructure to accept requests for information.

The Illinois judicial branch can, and should, be held to the same standards as the two other branches of government in Illinois, and be included in Illinois' Freedom of Information Act. Without FOIA, the judicial branch lacks adequate oversight.

Budget Matters / Fiscal Policy

- ★ 1. **The General Assembly has been considering a \$300 child tax credit and a guaranteed income pilot. Do you support these benefits for Illinois residents regardless of immigration status? Why / Why not?**

BACKGROUND on Child Tax Credit: The Governor is calling for a \$12.5 million proposal (although LWWIL has been advocating for \$300 million) for a state refundable tax credit. The credit would be available for all families below certain income levels with children from birth through age 17, not just those who receive the federal Earned Income Credit. This child tax credit would provide funding for each child whose parent earns less than the median income, and would benefit 1.4 million children, which is half of all the children in the state. Research shows that the tax credit will have immediate

economic benefits for the state, as up to 80% of the CTC is spent immediately and locally to buy goods and services.

BACKGROUND on Guaranteed Income Pilot: Guaranteed income is targeted for Illinois residents, regardless of immigration status, who provide care for a child, recently gave birth or adopted a child, or are enrolled in an educational or vocational program.

- ★ 2. **Do you support the state of IL increasing funding for evidence-based distribution to schools in order to meet the state’s commitment to improve funding inequities in marginalized communities?**

BACKGROUND: Because of the state’s low share of school funding, and local districts’ reliance on property taxes, huge school funding disparities between property-rich and property-poor districts have for decades created an opportunity gap for millions of Illinois children each year. Since 2017, annual Evidence Based Funding increases have been working well to distribute state funds where they are most needed. Underfunded districts have been making careful use of additional dollars, but-- until all districts are brought up to 90% of adequacy, Illinois school funding remains highly inequitable. Over 1.3 million students attend inadequately funded schools.

LWVIL has asked for an additional \$550 million for Evidence Based Funding despite the ISBE’s estimate that closer to \$819 million is needed to fulfill the legislature’s statutory obligation.

3. **Do you support expanding access to publicly funded preschool, high quality childcare, and home visiting programs to help all children start kindergarten ready for school?**
4. **Are you a proponent of Governor Pritzker’s decision to tear down two prisons this year (Stateville and Logan Correctional Centers)? What positive or negative impact do you think that decision will have?**

NOTE: THIS QUESTION MAY HAVE SPECIAL INTEREST TO LOCAL LEAGUES MOST IMPACTED BY THE ISSUE

BACKGROUND: Illinois spends an estimated \$22,000 in operational expenses to incarcerate one person for a year.[1] This figure rises to \$37,000 when accounting for capital costs and employee benefits, including pensions. The total proposed FY2021 General Funds expenditure for the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) was about \$1.5 billion, most of which was for the operation of prison facilities. IDOC operates 25 correctional centers, two treatment centers (Elgin and Joliet) for inmates with severe mental illness, two life skills re-entry centers and four adult transition centers.

Additionally, throughout the United States there is a bipartisan consensus that too many people are incarcerated. The concerns focus on the impact on inmates' families and communities, the loss of productive human potential, racial inequities and high financial cost. Despite recent reductions, Illinois still holds nearly 40,000 adults in its prison system, with significant fiscal impact.

Elections and Voting

- ★ 1. **Do you think it is important to have an Independent Commission to approve any change of boundaries of voting districts? What are your thoughts on other ways to prevent gerrymandering through partisan redistricting?**

- ★ 2. **Would you support a requirement that all candidates for public office in Illinois (state and local) provide an email address and phone number on that candidate's petition to be on the ballot?**

BACKGROUND: WHY IT MATTERS

- Communication with constituents – Email and phone contacts are essential communication channels for staying connected with constituents throughout the campaign.
- Media and Public Relations – non-partisan civic groups, journalists, media outlets want to contact candidates for forums, interviews, comments or statements regarding their campaign platforms, policies or current events.
- Accessibility and transparency – providing contact information demonstrates transparency and accessibility, signaling to voters that the candidate is open to communication and engagement

- Constituent Services – Even before being elected, candidates indicate their willingness to assist and listen to future constituents about their issues and concerns, to demonstrate their commitment to serving the public
 - Overall, providing email and phone contact information is an integral part of running a political campaign, enabling candidates to engage with voters and the media. Ultimately, contact with candidates would increase voter participation as more candidate information is available through newspapers, community news outlets and League sponsored nonpartisan voter information/forums
3. **Several bills have been introduced regarding local school board approval before locating polling places in schools. The League has a concern that limiting the election commission's choices for polling places will be detrimental to voters accessing convenient polling locations within their community. What are your thoughts on this?**

BACKGROUND on bills recently introduced:

- **HB 4053:** Sponsored by Katie Stuart (112th, Collinsville), Debbie Meyers-Martin (38th, Matteson), Barbara Hernandez (50th, Aurora), and Dagmara Avelar (85th, Romeoville). Was referred to the Ethics & Elections Comm. on Feb. 14. This bill provides that if use of the public building would interfere with the program, the public body and election authority would work cooperatively to find another location.
- **SB 2870:** Sponsored by Omar Aquino (2nd, Chicago). This is essentially the same as HB 4053. Assigned to Subcommittee on Elections on March 7.
- **HB 4709:** Sponsored by Maura Hirschauer (49th, West Chicago). Referred to Ethics & Elections on Feb. 28. This seems more problematic in that the school board can refuse to allow use of the school building outright.
- **SB 3383** Sponsored by Ram Villivaiaam (8th, Chicago). Referred to Subcommittee on Elections on March 7. This is essentially the same as HB 4709.

Public Safety

- ★ 1. **Do you believe that civilian possession of firearms is compatible with public safety? What ideas do you have, such as requirements for safe gun storage or**

funding of community violence interrupters, to help decrease gun violence in Illinois?

BACKGROUND on violence interrupters:

Violence interrupters are interventions under which the cycle of gun violence is seen as a threat to an entire community's health rather than an issue associated with single individuals. Interventions are targeted at the root cause, meeting the needs of those who have been harmed, who are at risk of being harmed, and who have caused harm.

Examples include:


- Street outreach in high-risk areas
- Restorative justice to prevent criminal convictions for non-violent crimes and unnecessary incarceration
- Developing networks of service providers and other stakeholders that support those at high risk of being impacted by gun violence
- Education to raise awareness about gun violence

2. What are your thoughts on strengthening legislation that would require the removal of firearms by police when a domestic violence survivor is granted a firearm remedy under an Order of Protection.

BACKGROUND and facts:

- The risk of intimate-partner homicide increases 500% when abusers have access to a gun.
- In domestic violence homicides where the victim had an order of protection, 20% of victims were killed within 2 days of the order being issued.
- Leaving a domestic violence relationship is a high lethal risk, especially after the victim has filed for an order of protection.

Environment and Environmental Justice

-  **1. Would you consider protections for wetlands along with preserving a certain percentage of Illinois' open lands to protect the environment and its**

biodiversity? How does the protection of wetlands and small streams factor into your constituents' legislative priorities? Explain.

BACKGROUND: Wetlands improve water quality, provide important flood control, protect our groundwater, and preserve endangered habitats.

The U.S. Supreme Court rolled back U.S. Clean Water Act protections for many wetlands and waters, including freshwater wetlands we rely on for flood control and habitat along major rivers. Illinois lacks a comprehensive program to protect our wetlands that are no longer federally protected.

Pressure from climate change, habitat loss, land use, and poaching is driving species to extinction and loss of biodiversity. A recent UN report stated that one million of all animal and plant species are on the path to extinction. One-third of all plants and animals could be extinct in 50 years.

There are major pushes to protect and restore habitat, manage land use and zoning, guard against poaching, plant trees and protect old growth forests, and establish protection for wetlands. There is a push by the UN to conserve 30% of land and water by 2030.

<https://news.arizona.edu/story/onethird-plant-and-animal-species-could-be-gone-50-years>

Other relevant facts:

- Illinois has already lost around 90% of its wetland acreage.
- Regardless of their political affiliation, hunters and anglers nationwide strongly favor (92%) restoring Clean Water Act protections for wetlands and streams.

- ★ 2. **Where do you stand on the reduction or elimination of polystyrene and single use plastics in Illinois including foam food-ware and plastic bags for take-away? What obstacles do you see in implementing such a law?**

BACKGROUND / FACTS:

- Polystyrene and Plastic Bags are not recyclable. Period, full stop.

- Plastic can persist in the environment for hundreds of years, so nearly every bit of our plastic waste is still out there.
- Far too much plastic waste comes from single-use plastic “stuff” — bags, take-out containers, bottles, packaging and more.
- Plastic pollution poses a serious threat to the environment and public health
- Plastic waste breaks down into Microplastics.
- Researchers have found stunningly high amounts of Microplastics in all five Great Lakes, which provide drinking water for 40 million people.
- Microplastics have been detected in mammals, birds, fish, tap & bottled water and soil.
- Microplastics have been found in human blood, breast milk and placentas, and in our lungs and heart.
- It’s estimated that we each ingest about a credit card-sized amount of plastic each week.
- Toxic chemicals in plastics are harmful to humans and wildlife.

3. The construction of pipelines to transport CO2 across the state is under consideration here in Illinois. Do you have any concerns with the environmental and health risks associated with these pipelines?

BACKGROUND: CO2 pipelines have been proposed in 23 Illinois counties, and more are on their way. The federal Pipeline and Hazardous Safety Materials Administration (PHMSA) has yet to complete new rules that will improve safety and oversight. In addition, no standards exist to ensure CO2 pipelines are set back far enough from homes and other occupied buildings to allow self-evacuation or rescue if a CO2 pipeline were to leak or rupture.

Concerns about CO2 pipelines:

- All pipelines have a risk of leak or rupture. CO2 pipelines carry an asphyxiant. At high concentrations CO2 can cause brain damage or even death in a matter of minutes.

- A rupture of a CO2 pipeline can cause deep craters at the site of the rupture and hurl broken pipe and other debris into the air. A CO2 release can last hours, and a toxic plume can travel more than a mile.
- Because CO2 displaces oxygen, a rupture or leak could make self-evacuation or rescue nearly impossible. Why? Internal combustion-powered engines won't run.
- The U.S. Department of Energy claims as many as 96,000 miles of CO2 pipelines could be built across the country by 2050 as part of carbon capture and sequestration projects (CCS). This includes Illinois, a target for CCS, and will place residents at risk.
- There are no funding mechanisms to provide first responders the training and equipment they need to ensure a safe and successful rescue of Illinois residents in the event a CO2 pipeline leaks or ruptures.

Rural Cooperative or Municipal Power Agencies

NOTE: THESE QUESTIONS MAY HAVE SPECIAL INTEREST TO LOCAL LEAGUES MOST IMPACTED BY THE ISSUE

- 4. Would you consider a recommendation that rural cooperatives or municipal power agencies be subject to the same transparency as governmental agencies for utilities?**
- 5. What types of recommendations would you have for the staff of rural cooperatives and municipal power agencies as to how to maintain ethical standards in their operation?**