



# Cook County Steward Handbook

[SEIU 73 Website](#)

## Table of Contents

- I. Stewards Rights, Roles & Responsibilities
  - A. Your rights & protections as a Steward
  - B. Steward/Activist Roles & Responsibilities
  
- II. Organizing & Recruiting Members
  - A. Membership Cards & Cope
  - B. Fighting back in the workplace
  - C. Orienting New Members
  - D. Know Your Contract Trainings
  
- III. Representing Members
  - A. Contracts
  - B. Understanding Grievances & Timelines
  - C. Grievance Investigations
  - D. Writing Grievances
  - E. Preparing for Grievance Hearings
  - F. Weingarten Rights

# STEWARD RIGHTS, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

## Rights & Protections as a Steward

**Legal Rights** As a steward, you are protected. When you're dealing with management on union business, you deal with the employer as an equal. The National Labor Relations Act and the your own union contract protect you from punishment and discrimination by management because of your union activity. It's illegal for an employers to:

- Deny you promotions or pay opportunities
- Isolate you from other workers
- Saddle you with extra work or unusually tough assignments
- Deny you overtime opportunities
- Enforce work rules unfairly against you or harass you with extra supervision.

**In addition to your legal rights as a steward, the contract guarantees you the specific rights as well. Look in your specific contract to know exactly what your contract says, but look below to see the highlights below.**

**Time to Handle Grievances** The union's representative and stewards shall be allowed to handle matters regarding enforcement of the Agreement during their working hours. Upon obtaining approval from their supervisor before leaving their work assignment or area, stewards are permitted to handle and process grievances referred by employees at the appropriate step of the grievance procedure during normal hours without loss of pay, provided that such activity shall not exceed a reasonable period of time. Permission shall not be unreasonably denied.

**Bulletin Boards** The Union may use bulletin boards designated by the Employer to communicate with bargaining unit employees as permitted by law. The Employer will endeavor to provide reasonable bulletin board access to all stewards.

**Right to Request Meetings with Management** The Union can submit requests for meetings, such as Labor Management Meetings or Informational Meetings. For these meetings, the union sets the agenda.

Labor Management Meetings: For the purpose of conferring on matters of mutual interest which are not appropriate for consideration under the grievance procedure, the Union and County agree to meet at Stroger, Cermak, ACHN (including Care Coordination), and Provident periodically through designated representatives at the request of either party and at mutually agreed upon times and locations. The parties shall prepare a written agenda one (1) week prior to meeting if so asked by the other party. The Union and County shall each designate not more than seven (7) representatives to a labor management committee for this purpose. These meetings may be conducted remotely at the request of either party. Both parties agree that prompt responses to issues raised in these meetings are of primary importance. Therefore, the time frame by which responses shall be provided to issues raised in these meetings will be determined by the designated representatives.

**Access to Information** Under federal and state labor laws, employers have an obligation to provide information that is needed by unions to carry out their duties as bargaining agents. Refer to the subsection under “Grievance investigations” to learn more about submitting an information request.

## **Steward/Activist Roles & Responsibilities**

*From SEIU 73 Bylaws: Activists shall be responsible for informing, engaging and activating members within their area in the program, campaigns, goals and objectives of the Local; participating in Local committees, distributing Local communications to the membership in their area; developing programs for internal organizing, including ensuring that all represented workers are members of the Local; and organizing new workers into the Local. There can be an unlimited number of Activists in the workplace.*

*Union Stewards shall perform all Activists roles. Additionally, Union Stewards shall report all contract violations and problems on the job to the assigned Local staff or officers to collaborate on avenues for resolution, enforce the contract, resolve disputes in the workplace, and receive and process grievances when members report a violation.*

**Your main responsibility as steward is to build a united, organized, and involved membership in your workplace.** Without this involvement and solidarity, no union in the world can protect and service it's members. As a leader in the workplace, you'll have your hands full. That's because SEIU stewards are...

- **Organizers.** This doesn't just mean signing up new members. It means you are responsible for organizing the whole workplace to deal with problems as a united group.
- **Problem solvers.** You're the person workers turn to with their problems. These problems could range from simple questions, to worksite hazards, to contract violations. Perhaps you can solve the problem with a conversation, or maybe you need to file a grievance, or organize worksite action.
- **Educators & communicators.** The contract, the health insurance plan, a Unfair Labor Practice (ULP). It's a complicated world, and your members are counting on you to help them make sense of it.
- **Worksite leaders.** You're the one who keeps it moving. You're the one who's not afraid to speak up to management. You make unity happen, and you never let anyone forget there is a union at your worksites

# ORGANIZING & RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

## Membership Cards & Forms

[Membership & COPE](#)

[COPE](#)

## Fighting Back In the Workplace

**“Does it Unite Us? Does It Build Our Power? Does it Make us Stronger?”**

*Karen Lewis, Former President of Chicago Teachers Union, was famous for asking these important questions.*

The number one role of stewards is to build power so we can fight back in the workplace. Every day there are new injustices that management forces upon members, and every day stewards and activists are called on to lead their co-workers in fighting for what is fair and just. We are lucky to have laws that protect us, and contracts that enforce our rights - but long before those existed workers were building power and organizing.

**Power** means the ability to act. Reverend Martin Luther King described power as “the ability to achieve purpose” and “the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change.”

**Organizing** means building power with the resources that we have. That can mean our strength in numbers, our political allies, etc.

The boss is trying to grow their power all the time. They try to pass laws and policies that erase your rights as union workers. They continually prioritize their bottom line over the needs of their employees. To effectively beat them, everything we do needs to bring us back to our central task: **building power in the workplace.**

Fighting back means employing creative strategies and tactics that help us bring our co-workers together around the issues that matter most. **Tactics** are what we do, **strategy** is why we do it. Here are some examples of tactics that we might employ in the workplace to fight back:

- March on your supervisor or boss
- Petitions & letters
- Stickers & buttons
- Rallies
- Townhalls
- Asking for our allies to stand with us
  - Politicians
  - Other unions
  - Community members
  - Students
- Strikes

# Orienting New Members

[Script & Resources for New Employees](#)

[Script for Conducting a Virtual Orientation](#)

## Welcome Email Template

Hey, *coworker's name*,

I wanted to reach out to formally welcome you to Cook County and SEIU!

For a little background, *job title* at Cook County are represented by SEIU Local 73 *specific bargaining unit* Unit. There are nearly *number of members* in our unit, which also include *examples of other job titles in your unit* and various other titles.

*Name yourself and nearby stewards* are Union Stewards. This role involves helping fellow union members with any issues related to working conditions, fair treatment, our collective bargaining agreement (contract), and to be a general resource to help people stay connected and engaged with the union. I'm happy to report that this union activity has resulted in a number of important improvements in our department! I'd be happy to discuss any of this with you in detail any time.

*Highlight any coworkers that may have participated on the bargaining committee as an additional resource for contract questions. Bargaining committee member name* has been extremely effective in negotiating on our behalf to guarantee a fair contract. \_\_\_\_\_ is our SEIU Local 73 Union Representative, which means they are staff at SEIU 73, and represents Cook County members during bargaining, grievances, as well as organizing union action and more. I've copied all of them on this email and if you ever have questions or work related issues, all of us are available to help.

Most of my union related messages are sent via my non-Cook County email, so please *provide personal email*. You also can call or text my cell phone any time.

Here is the link to sign up for the union: [seiu73.org/join](http://seiu73.org/join)

This authorizes the union to take dues from your paycheck which are crucial for keeping the union running and are used exclusively for day-to-day management of the union. This includes a salary for the Local 73 staff, lawyers, office space, and more. 100% of dues money goes toward the operations of the union. There is also an option to donate each pay period to the COPE fund, which provides funding for SEIU for political purposes including actions to address political issues that affect the union, and federal, state, and local elections. This is especially important since we are a state institution and the politicians in office and policies they create directly influence things like the amount of state funding UIH receives, labor laws and more. You also can sign a paper membership card to sign up. Let me know if you'd prefer this option.

Here's some important contact info:

*Your personal (non-Cook County) email and cell phone #*

*Other nearby steward(s)' personal email and cell phone #*

SEIU Local 73 Member Action Center (MAC) at 312-787-5868

### **Other Resources**

SEIU Local 73 Website: <https://seiu73.org/>

Cook County Union Updates: <https://seiu73.org/updates/cook-county/>

Contracts: <https://seiu73.org/contracts/>

Other Union Resources: <https://seiu73.org/resources/>

Member Benefits: [SEIUMB.com](http://SEIUMB.com)

Please respond to me with your non-Cook County email, so I can keep you up to date on all union things union related.

We're glad to have you in our department! Welcome to the team.

## **REPRESENTING MEMBERS**

### **Contracts**

[Local 73 Contracts](#)

### **Understanding Grievances & Timelines**

#### **Grievance Forms**

[Blank Grievance Form](#) (fillable PDF)

#### **What is a grievance?**

##### Violation of the contract

Contract violations involved such matters as seniority, hours of work, staffing, wages, working conditions, holidays and vacation and disciplinary action without just cause which are covered specifically in the contract.

##### Violation of past practice

The contract does not cover every practice on the job. Some have been established and recognized by both the union and management, and may be written or unwritten.

##### Violation of fair treatment

Difficult to prove, but important for the union to document and grieve because if a worker is discriminated against or mistreated, the practice could spread.

##### Violation of federal and/or state laws

Laws written to protect workers are implicit part of the contract, and violations of them can constitute a grievance.

## Know your timelines!

*Management may abuse timelines as one tactic to get grievances thrown out. All four contracts explain the timelines, but if you want to reference a quick guide, you can reference this table as a quick guide.*

Step	Submission Time	Submitted	Meeting	Response
Step 1	30 calendar days	Dept/Division Head or Designee	10 days	5 Days
Step 2	7 Days	Chief Operating Officer/Designee	10 Days	10 Days
Step 3	10 Days	Chief, Bureau of Human Resources/Hearing Office (with a copy to the affiliate HR Director)	30 Days	30 Days (status report to Union if exceeded)
Step 4	30 Days	Impartial Third-Party Arbitration		

## Grievance Investigations

### Conducting an Interview

#### Five W's and an R:

WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? REMEDY?

#### Steps to conducting an interview

1. Find the right place and time for the interview.
2. Encourage the member to talk.
3. Let the member express his or her feelings.
4. Ask probing questions.
5. Help the member think through the problem.
6. Avoid making judgements or assumptions.

7. Avoid giving advice.
8. Take good notes.
9. Be clear about what happens next.
10. Never promise a victory
11. Go through CBA with the member.

## Submitting an Information Request

In most cases, when representing your members, you have the right to any "necessary and relevant" information the employer has. You can request this information anytime in the grievance process, including the initial investigation.

As a Local 73 Union Steward, you are entitled to information that is needed:

- To determine whether a grievance exists
- To prepare a grievance for presentation
- To determine whether or not to drop a grievance or to move it to the next step

Types of information you can request:

- Attendance records, personnel files, witnesses statements, etc.

Make the request *in writing*, being as *specific* as you can, and giving a reasonable *deadline*.

## Writing Grievances

Step 1 written grievances give the employer official notice that the union is pursuing the matter. Writing a grievance is not hard, but you should pay careful attention to a few legal phrases we're going to give you. It could become important later if the case goes to arbitration. **You will file your grievance at Step 1 by emailing it to your supervisor. Make sure you ALSO send the grievance to your union rep so they can be filed for the union's records too.**

A good grievance contains three parts:

Circumstances: Description of what happened (or didn't). This sentence includes the grievant's name or names and indicates where and when the incident occurred. Keep it short. You're not arguing your case here. You're telling what happened.

"When on or about [when] the employer did [What] at [Where] to [Who]..."

Violation: A statement that indicates why this is a valid grievance. Here you should reference the contract language that this was a violation of. If you are aware of any past practices or other violations relevant to this grievance, you can include them.

"The employer violated Article (s) \_\_\_\_ Section(s) \_\_\_\_ of the contract and any other relevant articles, rules of law, policies, and past practices when..."



Remedy: A sentence that tells the employer what the union is asking for. Basically, we consider what the worker would have if the violation has never occurred: wages, back pay, seniority rights, benefits, and so on.

If you know the remedy you seek, write “that the worker be made whole, including but not limited to [remedy].”

If you haven’t determined the remedy, you can write simply “that the worker be made whole in every way.”

If it’s a broad policy change, you can ask that management “rescind this change and restore former conditions” or “cease and desist this practice.”

If this is a grievance involving your co-workers, don’t forget to show them what you’ve written and explain what you’re doing. Make sure they’re in agreement.

***\*NOTE: In the grievance form above, Circumstance + Violation are the two elements that go into the box that says “Statement of Grievance.” Remedy is written into the box that says “Resolution.”***

Want some extra practice? Use this [Grievance Writing Practice](#) form to give it a go yourself, look over with your union rep if you have questions!

## **Tips for Writing Grievances**

1. Limit details to basic information. Provide only enough information to identify the grievance so that management understands 1) what the basic problem is, 2) what violations have occurred, and 3) how the problem should be fixed.
2. Omit union’s arguments. This information could be used by management to prepare a better case against the union.
3. Don’t limit contract violations. In stating WHY there is a grievance, use the phrase “violated the contract” and the words including “article \_\_\_” when citing specific articles or sections in the contract. Stating things like “any and all other clauses that may apply” or “any and all other politics and past practices” help keep this open ended.
4. Avoid personal remarks. The grievance states the UNION’s position, not yours (or the grievant’s) opinion. Avoid the use of phrases like “I think” or opinions about management.
5. Don’t limit the remedy. If you limit the remedy, 1) you don’t allow the union room to bargain on the grievance. 2) You might limit the union to something less than full compensation for the grievance by leaving out something you may remember later. This can be accomplished

by using the general phrase “made whole in every way” and the word “including” when referring to specific remedies.

6. Consult with the grievant. Go over the grievance, explain the requested remedy and get the grievant’s full understanding and agreement.
7. Communicate & educate. Explain the grievance to your members and be sure they understand and support your efforts. Keep the grievant up to date on each action.
8. Arbitration. Prepare each case on the assumption that it may go to arbitration.

## **Preparing for a grievance hearing**

Step 1 meetings usually involve a low-level supervisor. This can be good or bad. On the one hand the supervisor may want to solve the problem before it gets to his or her supervisors. On the other hand, the supervisor may lack the authority to make things right. Remember to do the following:

- Write down your main points and the facts that support them
- Anticipate the arguments management will use - try to “think like a boss”
- If the grievant will attend the meeting, prepare them in advance. Decide what should and should not be said.
- Take good notes, if the case goes to Step 2, 3 or arbitration, your notes can make the difference between winning and losing.
- Always maintain a united front. Call a caucus if any member has an objection or suggestion (or if management surprises you).
- Never volunteer information that doesn’t help
- Don’t admit to charges that hurt your case. Management has to prove their case.
- Debrief the meeting with the member and define what happened
- Keep written records of everything!

## **Weingarten Rights**

As union members, you are entitled to Weingarten Rights. Weingarten Rights guarantee an employee the right to Union representation during any meeting with a supervisor that could result in disciplinary action. The employer is not obligated to inform the employee of the right to Union representation. It is the employee’s responsibility to ask for representation when they feel a supervisory interview may result in disciplinary action.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are scheduled to meet with a supervisor for any discussion that could potentially lead to discipline, you should directly ask your supervisor "Could this meeting result in discipline?"

--or you could have the following printed out and read it --

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer, or steward be present at this meeting."

The manager must answer with a simple yes or no.

As an employee, you don't have the right to refuse to attend the meeting, but you do have the right to ask for union representation.

If you ask for union representation the supervisor/manager has 3 choices.

1. Delay the meeting for when an union steward can be present, and employee has time to talk in private with the steward ahead of time
2. Deny your request and end the interview
3. Give you a clear choice to continue the interview without representation or ending the interview.

It's important to understand these rights because often supervisors/managers will not inform you of them. In any instance where discipline could happen, the union steward is present to make sure any potential discipline is conducted fairly. If you want to read a little more, [this page from SEIU](#) summarizes what to do in particular situations.