

Office of the Speaker of the House

The Speaker of the House of Representatives derives responsibility and influence over legislative activities through statutes, constitutional mandates and House rules of procedure. Chosen by members of the House, the Speaker invites participation from a wide range of philosophies from members of both parties in determining a legislative agenda.

As the presiding officer of the House, the Speaker determines when the House will meet and what type of business it will conduct. As manager of debate on bills, resolutions and amendments, the Speaker is responsible for recognizing members, formally calling votes, deciding parliamentary issues and maintaining decorum in the House chambers.

The comprehensive duties of the office include managing all House offices, facilities, professional and clerical staff, custodians, and security personnel. Administratively, the Speaker signs and authenticates all acts, proceedings, orders, writs, warrants and subpoenas issued by the House.

In organizing a team to help ensure smooth operation of House proceedings, the Speaker selects the Majority Leader, Deputy Majority Leaders and Assistant Majority Leaders. The Speaker may appoint chairs and majority members of standing committees, which are the public forums of proposed legislation.

Traditionally, the Office of the Speaker of the House has a profound bearing on the effectiveness of Illinois government and citizen representation in the state.



Emanuel "Chris" Welch
Speaker of the House

Emanuel "Chris" Welch (Democrat) has served as a state Representative in the Illinois General Assembly since January 2013. On January 13, 2021, Welch was elected Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, becoming the first Black lawmaker to hold the position in this state. Prior to becoming Speaker, Welch served as chair of the House Executive Committee and the Higher Education Committee.

As state Representative, Welch focused on improving classroom education, creating jobs, helping the most vulnerable and streamlining government. Welch was the chief sponsor of the historic Illinois Trust Act — the law making Illinois a welcoming state for immigrants — and the Homeless Bill of Rights. Speaker Welch is also a leading voice for adding people of color to the boards of publicly held corporations after sponsoring landmark legislation that requires Illinois corporations to annually disclose their board composition.

Welch has been recognized numerous times for his legislative record, including the prestigious Zeke Giorgi Award from the AFL-CIO and the Friend of Education Award from the Illinois Education Association.

Prior to joining the General Assembly, Welch served 12 years on the Proviso Township High School Board of Education, serving as the board chair for 10 years. Welch led the Proviso School Board in the creation of the Proviso Math and Science Academy, a school that today is recognized for excellence by *Chicago Magazine* and *U.S. News & World Report*. He accomplished this and managed to balance the school's budget for the first time since the early '90s.

Welch is of counsel at the law firm Ancel Glink. Prior to that, he served as a partner at Sanchez, Daniels and Hoffman, LLP from 2007 to 2018. Welch has been recognized as a Super Lawyer and one of Chicago's Leading Lawyers.

Welch received his B.A. from Northwestern University and his J.D. from The John Marshall Law School (JMLS). He is a 2016 inductee into The JMLS Wall of Fame.

Welch and his wife, ShawnTe, have two children — Tyler and Marley.



Greg Harris
Majority Leader

Greg Harris (Democrat) was elected to the Illinois General Assembly in 2006 and became Majority Leader of the House of Representatives in 2019. Harris represents the 13th District, which includes parts of Uptown, Ravenswood, Lincoln Square, North Center, West Ridge and Bowmanville. A gay elected official who is also openly living with HIV, Harris is the first openly gay person in Illinois to become a member of legislative leadership.

Harris has been a major sponsor of health care reform and insurance reform, and he has led House Democrats’ efforts to rein in the cost of prescription drugs and to protect lifesaving services like breast cancer screenings, child care and health care for the elderly. In 2013, Harris led a historic effort to make Illinois one of the first states to pass legislation ensuring equal rights for same-sex couples. He continues to focus on the needs of Illinois’ homeless and at-risk youth, comprehensive breast cancer services, marriage equality, trans issues, protecting people with disabilities, nursing home quality, and affordable health care.

Harris previously served as House Majority Conference Chair, chaired the Appropriations-Human Services Committee and served as the House Democrats’ lead budget negotiator. Harris is a member of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Leadership Council. He also served as chair on the Violence Prevention Task Force and is a member of the Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force, the Quality of Life Board, and the House Task Force on Sexual Discrimination and Harassment.

Jim Durkin (Republican) was first elected House Minority Leader in August 2013. He served in the House from 1995 to 2002, when he became the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate. He returned to the General Assembly in 2006 when he was elected to represent the 82nd District.

In 2008-09, Representative Durkin served as the ranking Republican on the House Special Investigative Impeachment Committee that recommended impeachment and removal from office for former Gov. Blagojevich. During the 99th General Assembly, Durkin sponsored the Illinois firearm trafficking law to keep illegally acquired guns out of the hands of gang members. He also successfully negotiated property tax freeze legislation and legislation to combat Illinois’ heroin crisis. Prior to being elected Republican Leader, Durkin served as an Assistant Republican Leader, was a member of the Illinois Task Force on Gang Violence, fought to protect children from sexual predators and is a founding member of the Illinois Legislative Diabetes Caucus.

Durkin received his bachelor’s from Illinois State University and his law degree from The John Marshall Law School. He is a former assistant Cook County state’s attorney and assistant Illinois attorney general and currently serves as counsel for the law firm of Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr, LLP.

Durkin and his wife live in Western Springs with their family.



Jim Durkin
Republican Leader