

# TALKING POLITICS AT WORK

- *Ready for a new government in Ontario?*
- *Want to get involved and mobilize your co-workers for the provincial election?*
- **Read this to understand your political rights!**



Yes, employees have the right to engage in political activities. But it is essential to understand that your actions and any political activity should be independent of your role as an educator and not interfere with your ability to perform your professional duties.

## Is there a duty to the employer/school board?

The duty of loyalty owed to an employer does not require absolute silence from educators working in public school boards. Like other unionized workers, ETFO members have a substantial right to freedom of expression under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* when they share their opinions. Arbitrators, labour boards, and the courts have supported educators' rights under the Charter to express their views on matters such as education funding and class size, absent evidence of harm to students or the education system in general. This means a school board directive that prohibits educators from expressing their views on any matters relevant to the workplace would likely be found to violate the Charter.

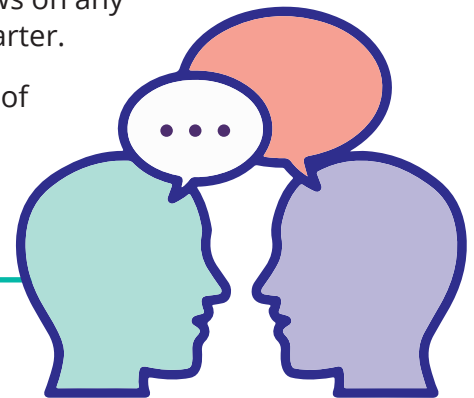
However, despite significant Charter protections, an employee's freedom of expression is not absolute. For example, employees cannot make false or malicious comments about their employer.

## Start conversations

Member-to-member conversations at work are absolutely within your democratic rights and are a meaningful way to get members involved in and prepared for the next Ontario provincial election.

Research and history have shown that personal conversations, not social media or advertisements, are the most effective way to engage and motivate people to act. This is because conversations help persuade or enhance someone's understanding of the broader political agenda and why voting matters.

Of course, this doesn't mean one conversation can fully transform someone's views. Still, regular conversations help build meaningful connections that deepen trust and our capacity to mobilize, so start talking!



As a union member, you have the right to encourage other members to get involved. Encouragement can take the form of holding meetings, handing out flyers, sending emails, and posting on social media to inspire members to support the candidate(s) and party the union or ETFO local supports because of its position on public education, public services, and working people in Ontario.

### What if someone has a different political view?

The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* provides all of us with “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” and “freedom of association.” The Charter outlines that any restriction should be “only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society” (such as limiting hate speech or discrimination).

Open political discussion with co-workers can help create a more informed and engaged workforce. When employees can freely exchange ideas and information about current events respectfully and critically, we are all better equipped to make informed decisions about the issues that affect our work and our communities.

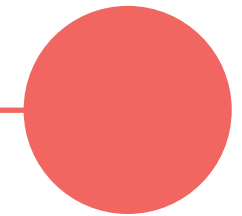
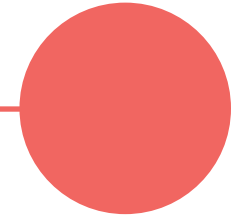
### Can I wear my ETFO button at school?

Canadian courts have established that employees who wear a button, T-shirt, or accessory in the workplace for a lawful union action are exercising their right to freedom of expression around a protected activity. An employer that attempts to curtail such actions would be violating your rights under the Charter, and ETFO would aggressively defend those rights through appropriate legal channels.

While unionized workers have substantial freedom to wear items in the workplace that support union-related and/or collective bargaining activities, there are some limits to exercising that freedom. For example, items worn at work should only include messaging that is acceptable in a school environment (e.g., no profanity, no violent imagery, etc.) and that does not disrupt the member’s normal work activities.

### Can I use my classroom email list to send parents a flyer about education funding cuts?

Information collected or managed in your capacity as a school board employee should only be used for work-related activities. For example, emails collected to keep parents apprised of their child’s academic progress or a school social media account administered by an ETFO member should not be used for political purposes or to disseminate union information about bargaining.



## Are there limits or restrictions for unions?

The *Election Finances Act* explicitly states that political advertising does NOT include communication in any form directly by a labour union to its members. It is important to note that while there are limits and rules on communicating with the general public or aiding candidates and parties, our union and ETFO locals have the right to engage in political communications and mobilize members.

There are no restrictions, financial guidelines, or reporting required under the *Elections Act* as long as we are communicating directly with members and not the public.

## How can educators participate in elections?

Educators have the right to participate in political activity, including a political or electoral campaign, on their personal time and outside work duties. It is also your right to support or oppose a political candidate or a political party by engaging in any of the following:

- volunteering, canvassing, or fundraising for a candidate or a political party
- displaying political material such as a picture, sticker or button, or placing a sign on the lawn/window of your residence in support of or opposition to a candidate or a political party
- attending events, meetings, conventions, or other political gatherings in support of or in opposition to a candidate or a political party
- developing promotional material such as campaign speeches, slogans, and pamphlets for a candidate or a political party
- using blogs, social networking sites, or a personal website to express personal views in support of or in opposition to a candidate or a political party

MOBILIZE AND EXERCISE  
YOUR RIGHTS – VOTE

