

Category: Political Advocacy

Description: SEAIO helped extend Illinois' Structural Engineering Practice Act for another ten years. This multi-year effort involved SEAIO Board members, Executive Director, and Government Affairs and Structural Engineers Political Action Committee (GAC/SEPAC) members collaborating with other organizations with practice acts renewing, communicating with legislators and lawyers, and drafting changes to the current practice act. SEAIO's work ensured that government officials understood Structural Engineers' contributions to safe structures, proved by unanimous House approval for the bill. Additionally, having a separate Structural Engineer license in Illinois helps the public identify the profession as one that requires specific technical knowledge and skill. This effort strengthened SEAIO's relationships with AIA, IDFPR, IPLSA and ISPE.

The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) regulates all professions requiring licensure in Illinois, and while SEAIO works closely with them on a regular basis with the SE Board, licensure and CE questions, etc., the Department still has their own internal agenda. When the SE Act came up for renewal, the Architect, Land Surveyor and Professional Engineer acts were also renewing. We joined these other organizations to form a coalition to ensure our professions' needs were taken into account by IDFPR.

There was a core group from SEAIO (two board members, the GAC Chair and the ED) who handled the bulk of the research, negotiations and Act reviews. Other members with a variety of practice background were enlisted to review changes to ensure all practice areas were well-represented. We were on a very tight deadline with turnaround times less than 24 hours in many instances, so the roles of each person fluctuated depending on availability.

We have a good relationship with AIA Illinois and Illinois Society of Professional Engineers (ISPE) and have worked with them in the past on legislative issues affecting all of our professions. The Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association (IPLA) was brought into our coalition for the acts renewals. By forming the coalition, we presented a united front to IDFPR, giving us access to what the Department was telling each individual profession and enabling us to all make demands for changes favorable to the professions because it was made available to another profession, and vice versa. The coalition also shared the financial cost of engaging legal counsel, which was imperative in ensuring legal language included in the Act was appropriately interpreted.

Illinois was the first state to regulate the practice of structural engineering, and we want to ensure this practice continues. As buildings grow higher, and bridges become longer, the potential for devastation increases. We want to ensure the health and safety for the general public, and licensure is imperative to maintaining the rigorous expectations necessary for structural engineers to perform their work.

We were able to communicate this information to our membership and database, but didn't focus on alerting the general public, which was definitely a missed opportunity. The message to our members was to let them know how SEAIO was working for them, and the profession.

Through this recent renewal process, we were exposed to a new crop of legislators, and we've implemented the practice of inviting our legislators to our dinner meetings and other events of interest. Specifically, the GAC/SEPAC and PR/Outreach committees contact their legislators via email, and extend an invitation along with what SEs do and why they're important. Regardless of whether the legislators attend, we believe this regular communication keeps structural engineering top of mind for the legislators.

Hyperlinks:

https://seaoi.org/sites/default/files/structural_engineering_act_renewal_-_sb0657_0.pdf (Press release from SEAIO)

<https://www.seaoi.org/se-practice-act> (Current SE Practice Act)

<https://www.hinshawlaw.com/events-kevin-sido-illinois-structural-engineers-association-panel.html> (SEAIO communicated the legal aspects of the bill by having lawyer Kevin Sido as a panelist at a chapter luncheon)