

# Friedrichs Plaintiff and AAE Member Karen Cuen Updates Members on Supreme Court Case

After just two years working through the court system, the Supreme Court agreed in June to hear *Friedrichs vs CTA* this fall. As one of the plaintiffs in the case (there are ten of us total), I can't tell you how excited we all are that we will finally have our day before the highest court in the land.

## A short backstory

In California, which is not a right-to-work state, a teacher may opt out of the union but is still required to pay their "fair share" dues, which come to about \$600 per year. We first must pay the full dues of \$1,000 and then can receive about \$300 of that back as a "rebate," which is the amount the union says it uses for political purposes. In *Friedrichs*, we are asking the court to go further and rule that both the "fair share" and the political portion of union dues

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Overlooking the Pacific Ocean at Dana Point, the plaintiffs of the Friedrichs case gather from all over the state to discuss the case moving forward. The group has gathered three times since the case was filed in April 2013.

From left to right: Jelena Figueroa, Rebecca Friedrichs, Scott Wilford, Harlan Elrich, Kevin Roughton, George White, Irene Zavala, Peggy Searcy, Karen Cuen (Missing: Jose Manso).



must be voluntary. Our position is that *everything* the union does is inherently political. It's a First Amendment issue. If we put our money where our mouths are, so to speak, then the union is not the voice we want speaking for us. We are tired of funding CTA's agenda.

The *Friedrichs* plaintiffs hail from school districts all over California—Tulare, Fresno, Orange, Anaheim, La Mirada, Saddleback, and Bakersfield, just to name a few. I found out about the lawsuit through AAE, when I received an email in 2013 asking for volunteers to put their faces and reputations behind the lawsuit. I emailed back immediately, thinking there would be so many volunteers that I wouldn't be "accepted" as a plaintiff. Soon we learned that many teachers were apprehensive about taking on the David and Goliath-esque task of engaging CTA/NEA in a legal battle and that only ten of us had stepped up. I totally understand that. I was apprehensive too, not knowing if or how I would be punished by my colleagues for agreeing to participate. As it has turned out, most of my colleagues have been supportive of my right to participate in the suit.

Before the lawsuit, none of us plaintiffs knew each other. In the ensuing two years, we have met together several times, and have grown closer as we have moved through the legal process. We have found that we agree on so many issues, not just those having to do with the case. I am blessed beyond belief to have met this wonderful group of people!

If you'd like to follow the case with no media bias, visit the U.S. Supreme Court Docket and search case number 14-915.

### How you can help

First and foremost, if you are a praying person, our case needs prayer. We are up against powerful entities that are angry with us for shaking their beehives. We need people who will pray that justice will prevail. We need prayer that our attorneys will present our case clearly, with confidence and determination. We need prayer for the Justices, that they will think clearly about our case, and rule based on the Constitution, not their personal biases.

Second, when we win our case, we will need help getting the word out to teachers that they no longer have to pay dues to their union. This will affect every teacher in every state that is not yet a right-to-work state. Will the media and the unions themselves help us spread the word? Unlikely. Teachers need to be educated and empowered

to know that they can now control their own purse strings in regard to having to pay (or not) for the privilege of having a job in public education.

This is an exciting time to be a public school teacher! And who knows? A union that can't strong-arm money from its members might just end up being a kinder, gentler organization that makes itself attractive and useful to its prospective members. Seriously, it could happen! ■



**Karen Cuen** is an elementary school music teacher in Chino Valley USD. As a teacher in Chino, California for over 20 years and a former school board member in her hometown, she gained an understanding of public school politics from both sides of the spectrum. These experiences have sparked her interest in seeing real reform in the near future.

Are you passionate about teacher freedom of choice? Email us at [Editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:Editor@aaeteachers.org) for more information about how to get involved.