

## REGULAR MEETING OF THE ILLINOIS DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMISSION

A quarterly meeting of the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) was held on Friday, June 6, 2025, at IDHHC, 528 S. Fifth Street, Suite 209, Springfield, IL.

### Call to Order

Chairperson Dennis O'Brien called the meeting to order at 10:01AM.

### Commissioners Present

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	No	Wendy Deters	No
Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes	Lori Krakora	Yes
Kimberly Mokris	No	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes	Kevin Smith	No		

### IDHHC Staff

Benro T. Olives, Director

### Audience/Public

Dana Craig, Program Coordinator, IDHHC  
Will Lee, Interpreter Coordinator, IDHHC

### Approval Minutes

*Michael Dubowe moved to approve the minutes as read for the March 27, 2025, seconded by Tyrone Barnes. Motion passed.*

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

### Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Dennis O'Brien reported on the following activities:

- The Stakeholders Advisory Group has now held 2 meetings after the first meeting had to be cancelled. The Director will give more details in his report but impressed how involved members are in addressing the issues facing interpreter training programs in Illinois.
- There will be a closed meeting today to address both the closed meeting minutes review and evaluation of the Director.
- Getting ready to start Fiscal Year 2026 on July 1, 2025. Additionally, the new state agency, Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) is to commence operation on July 1, 2026. It is important to continue to collaborate with them during Fiscal Year 2026 to ensure adequate services to children with hearing loss.

## **Director's Report**

Director Benro T. Olives presented reports and updates on the following activities:

- The Governor's Office continues to prioritize new appointments and reappointments to the Commission. Three new Commissioners have been appointed in addition to Carlos I. Colon: Kimberly Mokris and Wendy Deters. Additionally, Michael Dubowe has been reappointed. The Commission currently has 11 members, with 5 of them serving on expired terms. As part of the 5-year Strategic Plan to increase the visibility of the Commission and the Board of Interpreters, Commissioners' photos and biographies have been published on the Commission website.
- Updates on the FY 2025 budget and expenditures were provided. The proposed FY 2026 budget includes an increase to support additional travel, staffing, and other expenses, as well as rising costs associated with live streaming.
- COO Position Search Updates #1. The Chief Operating Officer (COO) position, formerly titled Personnel Manager/Fiscal Officer, was initially posted on January 31, 2025, with an application deadline of February 18, 2025, later extended to March 4, 2025. A total of 19 applications were received: 11 before the original deadline and 8 from the extension deadline. Applicants who did not meet the minimum qualifications were disqualified either automatically or following a review by CMS. Those who met the minimum and/or preferred qualifications were considered for interviews. Five candidates were interviewed in April 2025. An offer was extended to the top candidate; however, the offer was declined due to the position not being available as a remote or hybrid role.
- COO Position Search Updates #2. The COO position was re-posted on May 14, 2025, with an application deadline of May 29, 2025, later extended to June 15, 2025. A total of 12 applications were received. Applicants who meet the minimum and/or preferred qualifications will be selected for interviews, which are scheduled to take place in July 2025. Further updates will be provided at the September Commission meeting.
- An update was provided on the Strategic Plan and Priorities Progress Report. The intention is for the Commission to achieve a total of 12 activities towards each goal in the year. To promote transparency, the report has been published on the Commission's website under the "[Progress Report](#)" section.
- Commission staff continue to collaborate with the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to establish a video conferencing setup that will enable live streaming of both Commission meetings and Illinois Board of Interpreters meetings for public viewing, ensuring full communication accessibility. A representative from DoIT attended the meeting and will provide recommendations on the necessary equipment. It is essential that the livestream supports a clear and effective flow of communication. The goal is to have the livestream operational by the end of 2025. This initiative aligns with the Commission's 5-year Strategic Plan to enhance public visibility of both the Commission and the Board of Interpreters.
- The Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG) met on April 14, May 2, and May 16, 2025. The group is focused on addressing the interpreter shortage and improving data collection efforts. Interpreter Training and Preparation Programs (ITP/IPPs) play a critical role in the

group's membership, contributing valuable insight into the challenges faced by interpreter programs, including program closures and other ongoing issues.

- The Commission attended or participated in the following events:
  - April 9, 2025: Statewide Stakeholders Alliance Meeting, Chicago
  - April 29-30, 2025: Career Spark STEAM Expo, Springfield
  - June 1, 2025: Chicago Hearing Society's Health Fair, Chicago
- The Commission is scheduled to attend or participate in the following upcoming events:
  - June 7, 2025: Black Deaf Awareness Day @ Swoboda, Chicago
  - June 10, 2025: ISBE & SELA Special Education Directors Conference, Normal
  - June 13, 2025: Institute for Parents of Preschool DHH Children, Jacksonville
  - July 10, 2025: Statewide Stakeholders Alliance Meeting, Chicago
  - July 14, 2025: Camp Launch Resource Fair at Southern Illinois Univ, Edwardsville
- The Commission is preparing a series of upcoming free professional development opportunities and BEI certification test preparation workshops, including online sessions for the BEI Test of English Proficiency (June 4–25), Advanced Performance Test (June 21–22), and Basic Performance Test (July–August); an in-person Medical/Educational Interpreter Training in Peoria (August 16–17); BEI Raters Training in Springfield (September 19–20); and a biweekly online book club discussion on educational interpreting running from September to November. These initiatives are offered in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education and funded through an ISBE Special Education discretionary grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Special thanks were given to Will Lee and Dana Craig for their planning efforts.
- The Commission has finalized the updated Bylaws, as amended and approved during the March 27, 2025, Commission Meeting.

Notable Revision – Article III, Section II: Terms of Officers:

*Officers shall be elected to serve two-year terms. Elections will be held at the final meeting of odd-numbered calendar years, with terms beginning at the first meeting of the following even-numbered year. In the event the Chair position becomes vacant, the Vice-Chair shall assume the duties and responsibilities of the Chair for the remainder of the term or until a new Chair is elected.*

Upcoming/Future Officer Elections Schedule:

- November 2025 Elections – for 2026–2028 terms
- November 2027 Elections – for 2028–2030 terms
- November 2029 Elections – for 2030–2032 terms

The Commission hosted a two-day Deaf Interpreter Training on April 25-26, 2025, in collaboration with the Chicago Hearing Society and Moraine Valley Community College, with grant support from the Illinois State Board of Education. A total of 24 participants attended the training. Upon completion, the Commission administered the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge-Based Test (DIKBT). Sixteen participants passed the test and are now eligible to become Licensed Deaf Interpreters at the Intermediate level, while the remaining participants are eligible for licensure at the Provisional level.

- House Bill (HB) 1783, the *Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Children Act* (LEAD-K), was filed by Representative Michelle Mussman on January 7, 2025. The bill has been tabled to the next General Assembly session. Representative Mussman has been actively engaging with stakeholders, hosting virtual meetings with both proponents and opponents on March 13 and April 14, 2025, with another meeting scheduled for July. Despite differing perspectives, she remains committed to gaining a deeper understanding of the concerns and is working to revise the bill to align with the existing Early Intervention and Early Childhood systems, as well as the newly formed Illinois Department of Early Childhood. Discussions and revisions are expected to continue through the remainder of the year, with the goal of introducing a revised bill in 2026.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission had been working with the Governor's Office to establish a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Legislative Day. The Commission is now reengaging in those discussions and is optimistic about the possibility of hosting the event in 2026.

***Tyrone Barnes moved for a lunch break; seconded by Lori Krakora. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

*Meeting recessed from 12:14 – 1:08 PM*

### **Director's Report Continued:**

The Commission website has been updated to include the following:

- [Biographies and headshot photos](#) of the Commissioners
- Updated [Progress Report](#) on the Strategic Plan and Priorities
- A [dedicated page for the Stakeholders Advisory Group](#) (SAG) meetings

### **Old Business**

None.

### **New Business**

None.

### **Public Comment**

None.

## **Open Discussion**

### **Interpreter Directory Concerns**

Concerns were raised regarding the difficulty in locating available interpreters through the online directory. It was noted that many interpreters do not respond to calls or emails. When responses are received, interpreters often indicate that they do not accept freelance assignments. A discussion followed regarding the potential inclusion of referral agency information and possible updates to improve the functionality and usefulness of the interpreter directory.

### **Commissioner Orientation Discussion**

Commissioners discussed ideas for improving the orientation process for new members. It was acknowledged that much of the current content is highly technical and may feel overly formal or dry. Suggestions were made to make the orientation more interactive and practical, particularly by including guidance on how to respond to inquiries from the public. Commissioners emphasized the importance of fostering public engagement and proposed that participation in community events could help raise visibility and allow Commissioners to connect more directly with the communities they serve.

***Tyrone Barnes moved for a 15 minute break; seconded by Michael Dubowe. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

*Meeting recessed from 2:29 – 2:43 PM*

### **Executive Session (Closed)**

***Michael Dubowe moved to close the meeting pursuant to 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) for personnel matters and (21) for closed meeting minutes review; seconded by Jennifer Sender. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

*Closed Meeting from 2:44 – 4:25 PM*

*Returned to Open Session*

***Jennifer Sender moved to end the closed session and return to open session; seconded by John Jun. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

***Lori Krakora moved after a review of the closed meeting minutes, all closed meeting minutes are to remain closed; seconded by John Jun. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

***Tyrone Barnes moved to accept the closed meeting minutes from November 11, 2024, as presented; seconded by Michael Dubowe. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

### **Adjournment**

***Joshua Sevier moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:26 PM, seconded by John Jun. Motion passed.***

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes
Lori Krakora	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes
Joshua D. Sevier	Yes				

<b><u>(Signature in file)</u></b>	<b><u>September 5, 2025</u></b>
Chairperson	Date

<b><u>(Signature in file)</u></b>	<b><u>September 5, 2025</u></b>
IDHHC Open Meetings Act Designee	Date