

## 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, September 5, 2025, at IDHHC, 528 S. Fifth Street, Suite 209, Springfield, IL.

### Call to Order

Chairperson Dennis O'Brien called the meeting to order at 10:08 AM.

### Commissioners Present

Tyrone Barnes	No	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	John Jun	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes
Kimberly Mokris	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes
Jennifer Sender	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	No		

### Staff

Benro T. Olives, Director

Tonia Bogener, Legal Counsel

### Public

Julia Speakman

### Approval Minutes

*John Jun moved to approve the minutes as read for the June 6, 2025, seconded by Michael Dubowe. Motion passed.*

Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes
John Jun	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes

### Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Dennis O'Brien reported the following:

- The Chairperson welcomed the new Commissioners. An orientation, typically held for new Commissioners, is scheduled for November.
- Director Olives will provide updates on the Stakeholders Advisory Group in his report, including the interpreter shortage and the use of an external consulting service to gather data on deaf services and other relevant issues.
- The Commission has updated bylaws; elections are now held every two years. New Commissioner Karla Giese, who replaces Lori Krakora, is serving as Interim Vice Chairperson until the elections this November.
- New Commissioners are encouraged to ask questions to more experienced Commissioners. Commissioner Joshua Sevier and other experienced Commissioners provide valuable insights and expertise to support new members.
- The Commission is currently operating under a five-year strategic plan, which began in 2024 and is effective through 2029. Commissioners are responsible for evaluating the

Director's performance particularly regarding the strategic plan and its goals, priorities, and activities.

- Efforts are needed to increase Facebook followers to improve the agency's visibility.
- A bill was passed encouraging the use of ASL in K-12 classrooms. Currently, ASL instruction is primarily provided by hearing teachers while restrictions such as ISBE requirements, qualifications, and teacher certifications limit deaf teachers' participation in teaching.
- More data is required across various areas, including nursing homes, foster placements, and children, to support legislative recommendations.

### **Director's Report**

Director Benro T. Olives reported the following:

- The Governor's Office continues to prioritize new appointments and reappointments for the Commission resulting in five new Commissioners: Carlos I. Colon (Champaign County), Wendy Deters (Lake County), Karla Giese (Lake County), Kimberly Mokris (Will County), and Roy Pyers (Sangamon County) and the reappointment of Michael Dubowe (McLean County). The Commission currently has 11 active Commissioners, with three serving on expired terms.
- Commissioners' pictures and biographies have been posted on the website as part of the five-year Strategic Plan to enhance the visibility of the Commission and the Board of Interpreters to the public.
- The November Orientation and Commission Meeting are scheduled for Thursday, November 20, 2025, and Friday, November 21, 2025. The Orientation will take place on Thursday from 1pm to 4:30pm followed by the Commission Meeting on Friday from 10am to 4:30pm.
- The Commission's amended bylaws, approved at the March 27, 2025 meeting, include notable revisions to Article III, Section II regarding officer terms. Officers will now serve two-year terms, with elections held at the last meeting of odd-numbered years and terms beginning at the first meeting of the following even year. If the Chair position becomes vacant, the Vice-Chair will assume the Chair's duties until a new Chair is elected. Upcoming officer elections are scheduled for November 2025 (2026-2028 terms), November 2027 (2028-2030 terms), and November 2029 (2030-2032 terms).
- As part of the five-year strategic plan to increase visibility, the Commission and Illinois Board of Interpreters meetings will be held in Chicago on Thursday, March 26, 2026 (Commission Meeting), and Friday, March 27, 2026 (Board Meeting). Commissioners and Board members are encouraged to attend both meetings, with travel, lodging, and related expenses covered.
- Budget information for the previous fiscal year (FY 2025) and the current fiscal year (FY 2026) is provided in the accompanying PowerPoint.
- The Chief Operating Officer (COO) position, formerly the Personnel Manager/Fiscal Officer role, was reposted on May 14, 2025, with an application deadline initially set for May 29, 2025, and later extended to June 15, 2025. A total of 15 applications were received, of which three were automatically disqualified and seven were disqualified after a CMS review, leaving five candidates selected for interviews (one later withdrew). In total, 10 applicants were disqualified for not meeting the minimum qualifications. Four candidates were interviewed in July, and the top candidate received a job offer on July 22, 2025, which was accepted. Cary Smith officially began as the new COO on August 18, 2025; a biography is available in your folder. The Commission extends its deepest appreciation to

Patty Greene, the outgoing COO, who retired after 36 years of dedicated service to the State of Illinois, including 26 years with the Commission.

- The Commission has completed the first year of its Five-Year Strategic Plan and Priorities (2024-2029). The Progress Report page has been updated on the website.
- The Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG) was established following a vote at the November 22, 2024 Commission Meeting. Legal Counsel consulted with the Attorney General's Office in December 2024 and January 2025 regarding OMA requirements for advisory groups. Invitations were sent in February 2025, resulting in over 15 expressions of interest, and the introductory meeting was held on March 24, 2025. Between April 14 and August 25, 2025, seven virtual meetings were hosted, accessible to the public via a live view-only link. SAG members, who are not Commissioners or official representatives of the Commission, serve without compensation and provide insights on issues affecting the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities, including interpreter shortages and data collection for Deaf services. The group developed 20 recommendations categorized as immediate, short-term, and long-term. The Commission will review these recommendations to identify actionable items, noting that some, such as changes to educational interpreter rules, fall outside its jurisdiction and will require further evaluation. Progress updates are posted on the Commission's website.
- As part of the five-year Strategic Plan to increase the visibility of the Commissioners and the Illinois Board of Interpreters, the Commission is working to livestream in-person board meetings for public viewing. In collaboration with the Illinois Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT), recommendations on the necessary equipment, technology, and capabilities have been provided to support successful livestreaming from the conference room. An internal test run of the system is being conducted today, with the goal of launching livestreaming for both board meetings in Fall 2025.
- The Commission successfully concluded three months of free online Professional Development opportunities and Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification Test Preparation Workshops in the summer of 2025, supported by a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education. Sessions included preparation for the BEI Test of English Proficiency (June 4-25), the BEI Advanced Performance Test (June 21-22), and the BEI Basic Performance Test (July-August). A Human Anatomy & Physiology Workshop scheduled for August 16-17 in Peoria, IL, was cancelled. The program engaged 96 unique participants and provided 42 hours of continuing education through BEI workshops. Special appreciation is extended to Will Lee and Dana Craig for coordinating IT logistics for presenters, managing registration and attendee confirmations, and overseeing the issuance of certificates and CEUs.
- The Commission is preparing upcoming free Professional Development opportunities and BEI Rater Training, including the BEI Raters Training on September 19-20, 2025, in Springfield, IL, and four biweekly online sessions from September to November 2025 titled *Complexities in Educational Interpreting: An Investigation into Patterns of Practice* Book Club Discussion. These sessions are designed for interpreters, parents, administrators, K-12 teachers of the deaf, and other professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing students.
- House Bill 1783, the *Language Equality Acquisition for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Children Act*, was introduced by Representative Michelle Mussman on January 7, 2025. The bill has 33 proponents and 6 opponents and was tabled until the next General Assembly session. Beginning in March 2025 and continuing through the summer, Rep. Mussman hosted virtual stakeholder meetings with both supporters and opponents. These virtual meetings will continue into early 2026 in preparation for the start of the General Assembly's 2026 legislative session.

- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Legislative Day. This topic was raised by Commissioner Lori Krakora at the previous meeting. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, IDHHC explored the possibility of hosting a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Legislative Day (DHHL) at the State Capitol. Although the previous point of contact for this initiative is no longer with the agency, a new contact has been established to discuss the potential plan for hosting DHHL in 2026.
- Current priority projects include, but are not limited to, the FY25 Annual Report and Public Accountability Report, the FY27 Budget Forecast and Request with the Governor's Office of Management & Budget (GOMB), the 2025 Annual Property Control Inventory, the reprint project for the Law Enforcement Communication Visor Card, and the training and transition of Chief Operating Officer responsibilities to the new COO, Cary Smith.
- Throughout the summer, staff were actively engaged in promoting the Commission's presence and visibility by attending, representing, and presenting at various events and conferences across the state. These included the Career Spark STEAM Expo in Springfield (April 29–30, 2025); the Chicago Hearing Society's Health Fair in Chicago (June 1, 2025); Black Deaf Awareness Day at Swoboda in Chicago (June 7, 2025); the Institute for Parents of Preschool DHH Children in Jacksonville (June 13, 2025); the Camp Launch Resource Fair at SIUE in Edwardsville (July 14, 2025); the Illinois Association of the Deaf Conference in Utica (August 5, 2025); and the ISD Outreach Statewide Conference in Jacksonville (August 11, 2025).
- Director Olives represented the Commission as a state agency member at the National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) 2025 Policy Summit, held on August 6–7, 2025, in Kansas City, Missouri, in conjunction with the Deaf Seniors of America Conference. During the summit, Director Olives participated in a panel with other state directors to address key issues such as communication access, equal opportunity, and quality of life for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals and also facilitated a group discussion on "State Programs: Challenges and Opportunities" with participation from more than 30 state directors and staff members from across the country.

***John Jun moved for a lunch break; seconded by Kimberly Mokris. Motion passed.***

Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes
John Jun	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes

*Meeting recessed from 12:17 - 1:26 PM*

### **Old Business**

None.

### **New Business**

None.

### **Public Comment**

None.

## **Open Discussion**

- Chairperson O'Brien shared a letter from former Commissioner Lori Krakora emphasizing the importance of the Commission's bylaws and offering recommendations to strengthen Commissioners' engagement and support for the agency and its staff.
- Chairperson O'Brien also led a discussion with Commissioners regarding the recommendations from the Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG). Director Olives presented 20 recommendations and explained how the Commission could take action on those within its scope, while noting that others fall under the jurisdiction of different state agencies. The Commission expressed interest in collaborating with those agencies and stakeholders to help advance the outlined recommendations.
- Commissioner Sender raised concerns about the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Civil Rights, which is the enforcement agency for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), placing ADA discrimination complaint investigations on hold. This pause has created strain for Equip for Equality, raising concerns about potential funding cuts and reduced support for protecting the civil rights of individuals with disabilities, particularly those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind.
- The Commission discussed the potential for hosting a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Legislative Day, exploring whether it could coincide with awareness events such as National Deaf Awareness Month in September. However, as the legislature is not in session that month, the Commission agreed that April or May toward the end of the legislative session may be more realistic options.

## **Adjournment**

***Roy Pyers moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:55 PM, seconded by Carlos I. Colon. Motion passed.***

Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes	Michael Dubowe	Yes
John Jun	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Jennifer Sender	Yes

<b>(Signature in file)</b>	<b>November 21, 2025</b>
Chairperson	Date

<b>(Signature in file)</b>	<b>November 21, 2025</b>
IDHHC Open Meetings Act Designee	Date