

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, November 21, 2025, at IDHHC, 528 S. Fifth Street, Suite 209, Springfield, IL.

Call to Order

Chairperson Dennis O’Brien called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

Commissioners Present

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

Staff

Benro T. Olives, Director
Dana Craig, Program Coordinator

Public

ISD Students & John Miller

Presentation

Julia Speakman, Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Statewide Accessibility & Accommodation Coordinator.

Julia Speakman presented on recent collaboration efforts related to services for the aging population. A Deaf Alliance, comprised of various stakeholders and state agencies including the Commission, identified significant gaps in services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing older adults. While the Illinois Department on Aging is currently conducting its own needs assessment, the Deaf Alliance sought to ensure that the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population were not overlooked. As a result of the Deaf Alliance’s work, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) developed recommendations for the Illinois Department on Aging related to communication access. These recommendations included, but were not limited to, the following areas:

- Completion of a communication needs assessment specific to Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.
- Ensure that contracted agencies providing services in home settings, nursing homes, and senior living centers are delivering appropriate accommodations and auxiliary services as required.
- Establish an Advisory Council.
- Develop a tailored resource list for providers, including recommendations for videos, appropriate verbiage, and other communication tools.
- Ensure communication access is provided in all meetings, and that informational materials are accessible, including requirements such as captioned videos.
- Increase hiring of bilingual and/or Deaf staff to improve communication access.

At this time, no formal action has resulted from the recommendations; however, updates will be provided as they become available.

Approval Minutes

Michael Dubowe moved to approve the minutes as read for the September 6, 2025, seconded by Kimberly Mokris. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Dennis O'Brien highlighted two items, with additional information to be provided in the Director's Report. The Commission will assist in promoting the Illinois ABLE program. There is a clear need for data on Deaf services, which is not currently available. As a result, it may be necessary to explore options to contract an external vendor to support data collection.

Director's Report

Director Benro T. Olives reported the following:

- The Governor's Office has appointed a new Commissioner, Jason Weiland, and reappointed Commissioner Jennifer Sender for a second term. Currently, three Commissioners are serving in expired terms.
- Commissioners' pictures and biographies have been updated on the website. This initiative is part of the 5-year Strategic Plan & Priorities which aims to increase the visibility and public's awareness of the Commission and Board of Interpreters.
- An audit is being conducted by the Illinois Auditor General's Office for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025. Findings will be available early next year and provided to the Commissioners.
- As part of the five-year Strategic Plan to increase visibility, Commission and Illinois Board of Interpreters meetings will be held at MOPD in Chicago, IL, on Thursday, March 26, 2026 (Commission Meeting), and Friday, March 27, 2026 (Board Meeting).
- Budget information of the previous FY2025 and current FY2026 are provided. The Governor's Executive Order establishing a 4% budget reserve requires that 4% of the state budget be set aside to protect against revenue shortfalls and emergencies. This reserve promotes fiscal stability, reduces reliance on borrowing or tax increases, and supports a stronger state credit rating as part of broader efforts to improve Illinois' financial health. The requirement applies only to the General Revenue Fund. Of the \$720,000 in spending authority, \$28,880 is set aside as the required reserve.

Joshua Sevier moved for a 15-minute break; seconded by Roy Pyers. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Meeting recessed from 11:23 - 11:39 AM

Director's Report continued:

- The Commission started its second year of the Five-Year Strategic Plan and Priorities (2024-2029). The Progress Report page has been updated on the website.
- The Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG) made 20 recommendations to the Commission Director. In response to the recommendations, the Commission is pursuing the following:
 - Initiating procurement process to secure consultant services to examine to resources available to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and establish comprehensive data.
 - Meeting scheduled for December 2025 with the Illinois State Board of Education and ISHI to discuss recommendations related to educational interpreters.
 - New Interpreter Training Program (ITP) in Chicago is currently undergoing the feedback and approval process, following the School Board's approval of the resolution for Truman College. An official announcement will be made by either MOPD or the college once the program is formally established and accredited.
- To continue improving the efficiency of the BEI certification process, the Commission hosted a BEI Rater training on September 19-20, 2025, in Springfield, IL to increase the pool of qualified BEI raters. On December 13-14, 2025, an online workshop will be provided on Preparing for the BEI Test of English Proficiency.
- For the first time, professional development opportunity was provided through a book club discussion on *Complexities in Educational Interpreting: An Investigation into Patterns of Practice*. Four biweekly online sessions were led by the book's authors during September to November 2025. These sessions were designed for interpreters, parents, administrators, K-12 teachers of the deaf, and other professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing students.
- The Commission will host a free in-person interpreter conference on April 24-26, 2026, in Springfield, IL. There will be tracks available for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing sign language interpreters.
- The Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) is re-establishing and strengthening its collaboration with IDHHC to improve statewide court language access. Efforts include expanding the pool of qualified sign language interpreters, reviving joint trainings, and hosting legal interpreter training, with additional sessions planned to support downstate needs in partnership with IDHHC. AOIC is also reviewing its Language Access Policy with input from IDHHC. This collaboration focuses on addressing interpreter shortages and improving access for consumers across Illinois courts.
- The Chicago Hearing Society has convened statewide stakeholders through the Statewide Alliance to address barriers and advance systemic change for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities, focusing on partnership and coalition-building to improve access and equity. Director Olives has participated in ongoing discussions and attended quarterly in-person meetings in Chicago since 2024. Key priorities include addressing the interpreter shortage, expanding employment access, improving mental health services, strengthening youth support, supporting hospital and senior housing access, and developing a centralized resource hub. Planning is underway for potential 2026 town halls focused on accessing information, barriers to access, and community needs. The alliance includes more than 20 agencies and organizations.
- 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. 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.

- The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) program allows individuals with disabilities to save for disability-related expenses without affecting benefits such as Medicaid or SSI. Key updates include expanded eligibility under HB 1432, raising the disability onset age from 26 to 46, and the introduction of a \$50 state matching contribution for new Illinois ABLE accounts, subject to funding. HB 3500 increases awareness by requiring annual ABLE information for parents and guardians of students with Section 504 Plans and sharing information with families of children in early intervention programs from birth to age three. Additional improvements include a slight reduction in investment management fees effective September 2025. These changes expand access, encourage savings, and promote earlier awareness to support long-term financial security for individuals with disabilities. At the Governor’s request, the Commission will also meet with the Illinois Treasurer’s Office to explore partnership opportunities.
- Current work priorities include, but are not limited to:
 - FY25 Annual Report & Public Accountability Report
 - 2025 Annual Property Control Inventory
 - 2026 Calendar Year Planning Activities
 - FY27 Budget Forecast & Request with Governor’s Office of Management & Budget (GOMB)
 - Reprint Project: Law Enforcement Communication Visor Card

Carlos I. Colon moved for a 40-minute lunch break; seconded by Roy Pyers. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O’Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Meeting recessed from 12:23 - 1:07 PM

Old Business

None.

New Business

Election of Officers for the calendar years of 2026-2028. Commissioner Sevier opened the floor for nominations.

Nominations for Chairperson - Dennis O'Brien. Dennis O'Brien accepted the nomination. All in favor of for Dennis O'Brien as Chairperson:

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes	Jason Weiland	Yes

Dennis O'Brien is elected as Chairperson.

Nominations for Vice-Chairperson - Karla Giese. Karla Giese accepted the nomination. All in favor of Karla Giese as Vice-Chairperson:

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes	Dennis O'Brien	Yes
Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes	Jason Weiland	Yes

Karla Giese is elected as Vice-Chairperson.

Public Comment

None.

Open Discussion

- Commissioners discussed the possibility of holding additional meetings outside of Springfield. The Chicago meeting tends to have higher public participation, and expanding meetings to other regions of the state may further increase engagement and visibility. Commissioners also noted the importance of ensuring the public is invited and encouraged to attend. Another idea discussed was scheduling Commission meetings in conjunction with other events to improve outreach and attendance.
- A recommendation from the Stakeholders Advisory Group (SAG) to the Commission Director was to explore the use of a consulting service to support data collection. This would require following the State procurement process, which includes multiple regulatory requirements. Commissioners also discussed additional areas to include in a potential RFI, such as determining whether Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) is being used when it is not appropriate or effective, as well as identifying failures to provide communication access in medical, law enforcement, and educational settings. These areas were identified as important for data collection.
- Commissioners discussed strategies to expand the Commission's social media presence, emphasizing the need for content that is more relevant to community interests. They also considered expanding outreach beyond Facebook by using additional social media platforms.
- In response to SAG recommendations regarding the interpreter shortage, Commissioners asked questions about the Illinois BEI certification process, including pass rates and potential barriers to success. Will Lee, Interpreter Coordinator, provided an overview of the IL BEI certification process and described current efforts aimed at improving pass rates and supporting candidates.

Kimberly Mokris moved for a 10-minute lunch break; seconded by Carlos Colon. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Meeting recessed from 2:27 - 2:37 PM

Executive Closed Session

Joshua Sevier moved to close the meeting pursuant to 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(2) for personnel matters and 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(21) for closed meeting minutes review; seconded by Tyrone Barnes. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Closed Meeting from 2:41 – 3:57 PM

Open Session resumed.

Roy Pyers moved to approve the closed meeting minutes as read for June 6, 2025; seconded by Carlos Colon. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Joshua Sevier moved after a review of the closed meeting minutes, all closed meeting minutes are to remain closed; seconded by Michael Dubowe. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

Adjournment

Kimberly Mokris moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:55 PM, seconded by Carlos I. Colon. Motion passed.

Tyrone Barnes	Yes	Carlos I. Colon	Yes	Wendy Deters	Yes
Michael Dubowe	Yes	Karla Giese	Yes	Kimberly Mokris	Yes
Dennis O'Brien	Yes	Roy Pyers	Yes	Joshua D. Sevier	Yes
Jason Weiland	Yes				

(Signature in file)

Chairperson

March 26, 2026

Date

(Signature in file)

IDHHC Open Meetings Act Designee

March 26, 2026

Date

APPROVED