



State of Illinois
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Commission



Annual Report 2024

Fiscal Year July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024



State of Illinois
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Commission

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

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To Governor Pritzker and the People of Illinois:

On behalf of the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission, I am pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report covering the period from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024.

To prepare for the development of its five-year strategic plan, the Commission surveyed stakeholders and diverse communities within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind populations, including those in rural and underserved areas. During a two-day meeting in Chicago, Commissioners reviewed over 500 survey responses. A significant portion of the feedback highlighted the urgent need to address the critical shortage of sign language interpreters in Illinois. The input from the various communities and stakeholders were essential in developing both the Commission's long-term and short-term goals identified for 2024-2029. The finalized five-year strategic plan and priorities document is available on the Commission's website in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language.

The Commission is pleased to announce that William Lee has joined us as Interpreter Coordinator, filling a vacancy left by the passing of Janet S. Lambert nearly three years ago. This pivotal position is responsible for overseeing sign language interpreter licensure, certification, and testing. This year, the Commission celebrates 15 years of regulatory oversight for interpreter licensure. It has maintained this responsibility since January 1, 2009, following the enactment of the Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007. Given the significant shortage of interpreters both statewide and nationwide, the Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to enhancing the efficacy of interpreter licensing, certification, and testing processes.

I hope you find the annual report detailing the Commission's significant accomplishments both useful and informative. The Commission eagerly anticipates ongoing collaborations with state agencies, fostering partnerships within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities and stakeholders to remove systemic barriers and advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in Illinois.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benro Ogunyipe".

Benro Ogunyipe, Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE COMMISSION

Commissioners & Commission Staff _____	2
Commission Overview & Statutory Mandates _____	3
Strategic Plan & Priorities _____	3

COMMISSION OPERATIONS

Commission Highlights _____	4
Commission Meetings _____	5
Commission Statistics _____	6
Legislative Bills & Resolutions _____	6
Appropriations & Expenditures _____	7

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007 _____	8
Illinois Board of Interpreters _____	8
Professional Development & Interpreter Training Programs _____	9
Illinois Interpreter Licensing Statistics _____	10
Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) _____	11
Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Based Test _____	12
Licensed Deaf Sign Language Interpreters _____	12

THE COMMISSION

The Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission is an executive state agency established in 1997 by the state legislature under the *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission Act* (20 ILCS 3932/1 et seq.).

COMMISSIONERS

The Commission is governed by eleven Commissioners who are appointed by the Governor's Office and represent different regions of the state.

Dennis O'Brien (Chairperson)	–	Wheaton, IL
Lori Krakora (Vice Chairperson)	–	Naperville, IL
Tyrone Barnes	–	Grayslake, IL
Jean Draths	–	Glenview, IL
Michael Dubowe	–	Normal, IL
David Frazier	–	University Park, IL
John R. Jun	–	Minooka, IL
Joshua D. Sevier	–	Chicago, IL
Jennifer Sender	–	Chicago, IL
Kevin Smith	–	Berwyn, IL

COMMISSION STAFF

The Commission is operated by a dedicated team of staff members.

Benro Ogunyipe	–	Director
Tonia Bogener	–	Legal Counsel
Dana Craig	–	Program Coordinator
Patty Greene	–	Personnel Manager
Lee Taylor	–	Office Assistant
William Lee	–	Interpreter Coordinator

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS (Licensure, Certification, & Testing)

The Commission serves as the regulatory body to license sign language interpreters under the *Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007*. The Commission also administers the Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification and Testing program, as well as the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Based Test. Further information regarding the Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007, including the Illinois Board of Interpreters and fiscal year statistics on sign language interpreter licensing, certification, and testing is provided on pages 8-12.



State of Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

Mission Statement

The Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission shall promote system change, community education and collaboration to advance effective communication access for all individuals with hearing loss in Illinois.

Commission Overview

The Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission is an executive state agency established in 1997 as a coordinating and advocacy body dedicated to representing the interests of deaf and hard of hearing people in Illinois.

The Commission collaborates with state agencies, communities, and stakeholders to remove systemic barriers and advance accessibility for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals throughout Illinois.

The Commission promotes effective communication through the use of technical assistance and training. The Commission also advocates for legislation and policies which are inclusive of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals. The Commission provides comprehensive statewide resources and maintains an online directory of all Illinois licensed sign language interpreters.

Statutory Mandates

The Commission is charged with eight mandates under its enacting statute, the [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission Act](#) (20 ILCS 3932/25). All Commission programs and activities are structured to align with these mandates.

Strategic Plan & Priorities

The Commission's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan and Priorities outline its short-term and long-term goals across the following five areas:

- Long Term #1: Organizational Visibility & Engagement with Communities and Stakeholders
- Long Term #2: Foster Collaboration to Modernize Communication Access
- Long Term #3: Data-Informed Collection and Sharing
- Short Term #4: Advancing Statewide Sign Language Interpreters
- Short Term #5: Elevate Culture of Inclusion and Equity for IL Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

The five-year strategic plan and priorities document is available on the Commission's website in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language.

COMMISSION HIGHLIGHTS

Statewide Services, Resources, and Information

The Commission provides comprehensive statewide services, resources, and information regarding communication access for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. During Fiscal Year 2024, the Commission responded to over 24,000 inquiries from a diverse range of individuals and entities concerning communication access, sign language interpreters, financial assistance for hearing aids, assistive technology, advocacy organizations, centers on independent living, filing discrimination complaints, educational options, telecommunication equipment, and DHS Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

Community Outreach & Collaboration

During Fiscal Year 2024, the Commission expanded its outreach and collaboration efforts by participating in various community and conference events, including the Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ITDHH) Conference in East Peoria and DeafNation Expo in Chicago. Additionally, the Commission presented at the Jacksonville Area Center for Independent Living (JACIL) and the Statewide Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services' Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf Meeting.

Technical Assistance, Consultation, & Training Support

The Commission provides technical assistance, consultation, and training support to enhance communication access to public and private programs and services for persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Commission successfully collaborated with various state agencies to improve or update their effective communication strategies in programs and services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. Notable collaborations included partnerships with the Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services – Division of Mental Health, and Illinois Department on Aging.

5,760

Communication Visor Cards

The Commission distributed over 5,760 communication visor cards to state, local, and municipal law enforcement agencies in Illinois, as well as to the general public. These cards serve as a valuable tool to facilitate communication access between law enforcement officers and Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals during traffic stops or roadside assistance. The communication visor card is also available for download on the Commission's website.



Commission Meetings

The Commission is composed of eleven voting Commissioners appointed by the Governor whose position, knowledge, or experience enables them to reasonably represent the concerns, needs, and recommendations of deaf or hard of hearing persons in the state of Illinois. The Commissioners hold public meetings at least four times a year. The meetings are open to the public, with the exception of closed sessions conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.



Two-Day
Commission
Meeting in Chicago
on March 28-29,
2024

Visit
idhhc.illinois.gov
for upcoming
public meeting
dates.



The Commission holds the majority of its quarterly meetings at its office in Springfield, Illinois. A two-day Commission meeting was held in Chicago, Illinois on March 28-29, 2024, to focus on the development of a new five-year strategic plan and priorities.



COMMISSION STATISTICS

	FY2024	FY2023	FY2022
Public Inquiry Responses	24,370	24,097	16,146
Educational and Informational Materials Provided	28,990	17,414	15,728
Participants in Professional Interpreter Development Opportunities	702	610	252
Communication Visor Cards	5,760	413	1,360
Electronic Communications Subscribers	1,050	739	715

28,990

*Educational and Informational
Materials Provided*

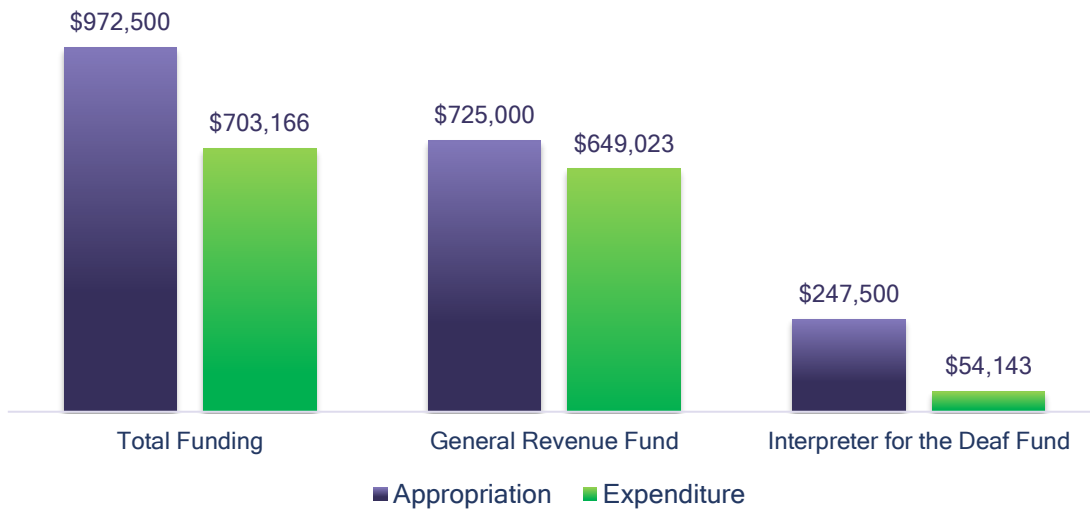
Legislative Bills & Resolutions

The Commission closely monitors Illinois legislation particularly bills and resolutions impacting the rights and interests of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. During 103rd General Assembly, thousands of bills and resolutions were introduced across various policy areas.

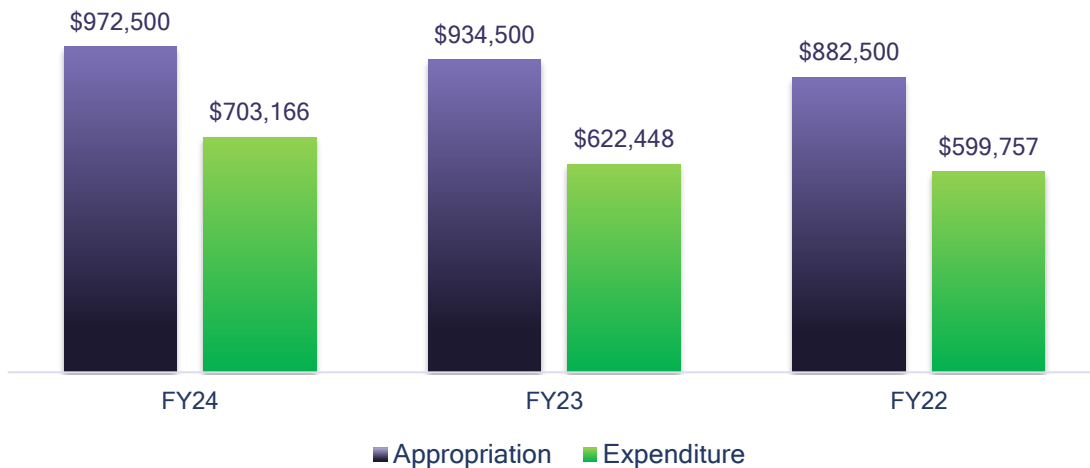
A significant milestone was marked by the passage and enactment of the Illinois Civil Rights Remedies Restoration Act ([Public Act 103-0150](#)). This legislation effectively restores the full enjoyment of civil rights that were unjustly limited by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Cummings v. Premier Rehab Keller P.L.L.C.* For additional information on relevant bills and resolutions, please visit the Commission's website.

APPROPRIATIONS & EXPENDITURES

Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations & Expenditures



Historical Appropriations & Expenditures (Total Funding)



SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007

The Commission serves as the regulatory body to license sign language interpreters under the [Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007](#) (Licensure Act). The Licensure Act and its rules establish the requirements for sign language interpreters providing services in Illinois including accepted certificates, provisional versus general license, proficiency levels, continuing education, and standards of professional conduct. In addition to being responsible for processing applications related to the licensing of sign language interpreters, the Commission also investigates allegations of violations under the Licensure Act. In the case of substantiated claims, the charge may be resolved by consent order including restrictions on practice and monetary penalties.

Illinois Board of Interpreters

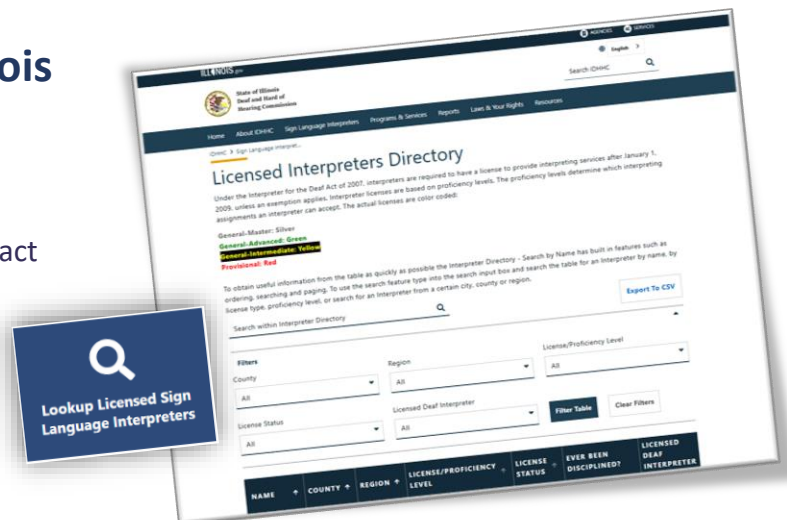
The Illinois Board of Interpreters, established by the Licensure Act, consists of seven members appointed by the Commission Director. The Board comprises four licensed sign language interpreters for the deaf and three deaf or hard of hearing consumers. The Commission Interpreter Coordinator serves as a non-voting member and provides reports to the Board. The Board provides recommendations to the Commission Director on matters related to the Licensure Act.

Laura Braucht (Chairperson)	–	Joy, IL
Kimberly Berger (Vice Chairperson)	–	Murphysboro, IL
Amy Miller (Secretary)	–	Glen Carbon, IL
Hershella Ashford	–	Chicago, IL
Ayanna Dowd	–	Homewood, IL
Teri Hedding	–	Palos Hills, IL
Desa Johnson Walls	–	Jacksonville, IL

The Illinois Board of Interpreters holds public meetings at least twice a year to discuss matters related to sign language interpreters, receive public comment, and make recommendations related to the Licensure Act. The meetings are open to the public. Upcoming meeting dates are available on the Commission website.

Online Directory of Illinois Licensed Interpreters

To facilitate the hiring of qualified licensed interpreters, a directory of licensed interpreters, including contact information, is available on the Commission's website. The directory can be filtered by proficiency level, license status, geographic region, and county.



New Interpreter Coordinator & Initiatives

Notable News

The Commission has successfully filled the Interpreter Coordinator position and remains committed to enhancing the efficacy of interpreter licensing, certification, and testing processes. With the newly hired Interpreter Coordinator, response times to interpreter inquiries and application processing have already decreased. The Commission looks forward to implementing new features for both the Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) and the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge-Based Test, including online test application and scheduling.

2024 Professional Interpreter Development Opportunities

The Commission hosted a series of online professional development opportunities and Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) preparation workshops for sign language interpreter students and licensed sign language interpreters as well as educational interpreters during the summer months.

A total of 24 professional development workshops and 6 BEI certification preparation workshops were offered, featuring a diverse range of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and hearing presenters and trainers. A total of 702 participants attended, receiving 139.5 hours of continuing education. These valuable professional development and preparation opportunities were sponsored by the Commission and made possible through a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education.

**2024 Professional
Interpreter Development
Workshops**

702

Total Participants

139.5
CE Hours
Offered

Illinois Interpreter Education, Training, Preparation Programs

The Commission maintains a list of sign language interpreter education, training, and preparation programs in Illinois. These programs offer comprehensive education and training designed to prepare individuals for the complex role of a sign language interpreter, emphasizing American Sign Language proficiency, interpreting skills, cultural awareness, and professional standards.

Current Program

College of DuPage | Glen Ellyn, IL
Columbia College Chicago^{1 & 2} | Chicago, IL
Illinois Central College³ | East Peoria, IL
Moraine Valley Community College | Palos Hills, IL
Southwestern Illinois College | Belleville, IL

Program Suspended or Closed

John A. Logan College⁴ | Carterville, IL
MacMurray College¹ | Jacksonville, IL
Quincy University¹ | Quincy, IL
Richland Community College | Decatur, IL
Waubensee Community College⁴ | Aurora, IL
William Rainey Harper College | Palatine, IL

Footnotes

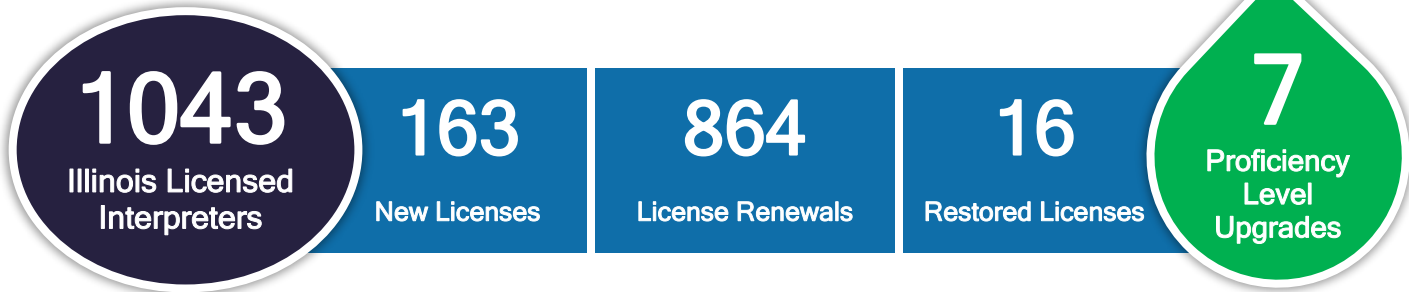
¹Offers Bachelor's Degree in Program

²Announced Program Closure by 2028

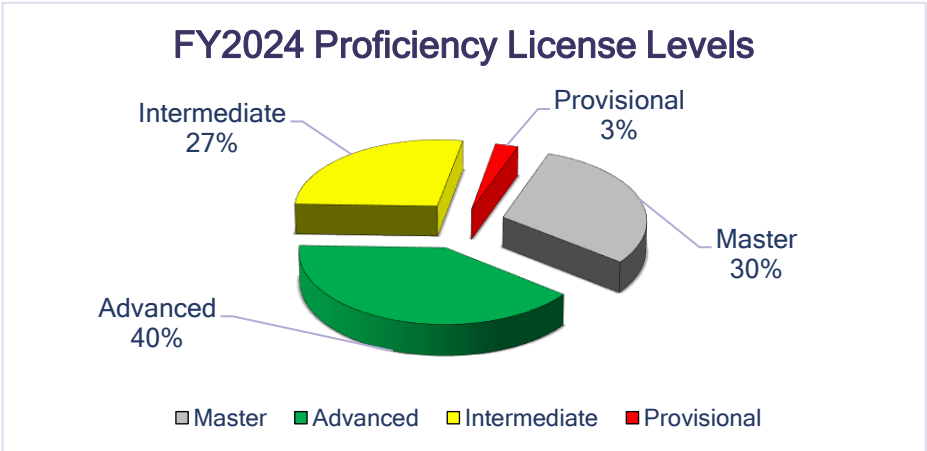
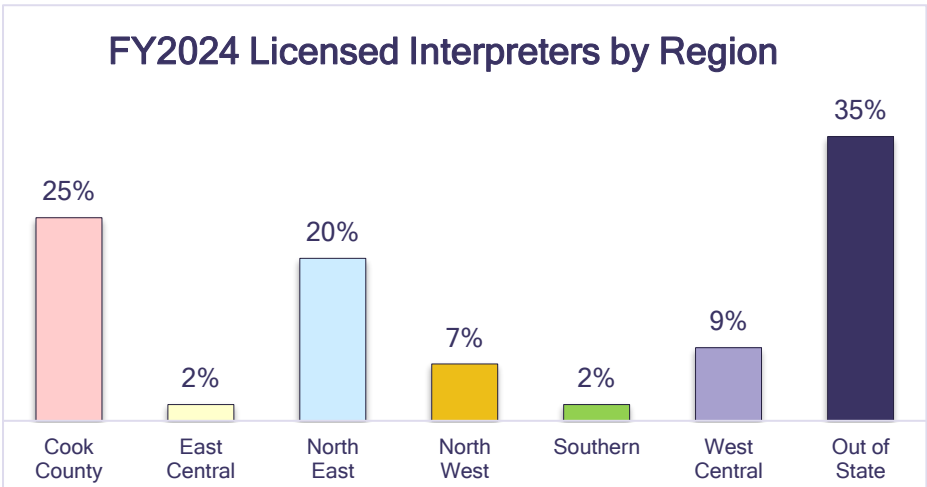
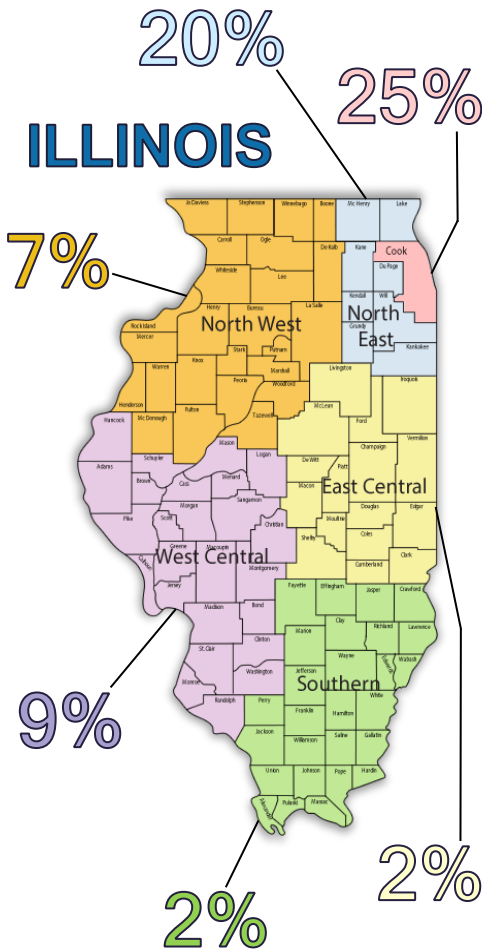
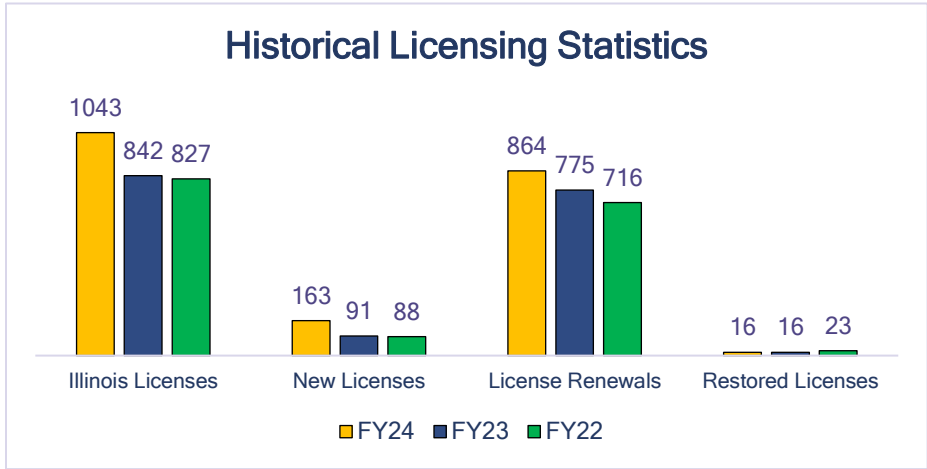
³Program Is Fully Online

⁴Currently Offers American Sign Language Classes Only

Illinois Interpreter Licensing Statistics



Fact:
The 2009 Annual Report showed an initial count of 603 licensed interpreters. This represents a 73% increase over the next 15 years to 1043 licensed interpreters today.

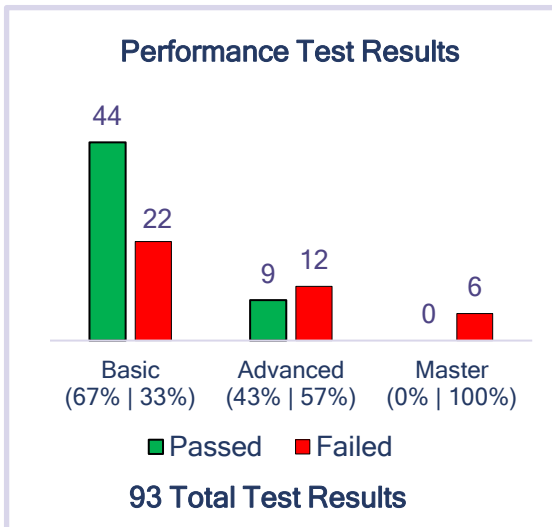
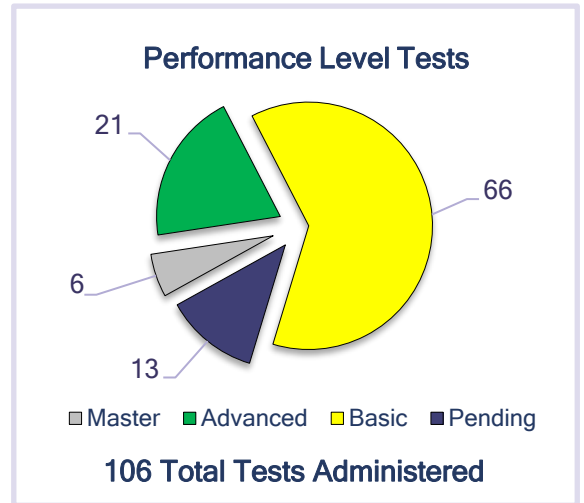
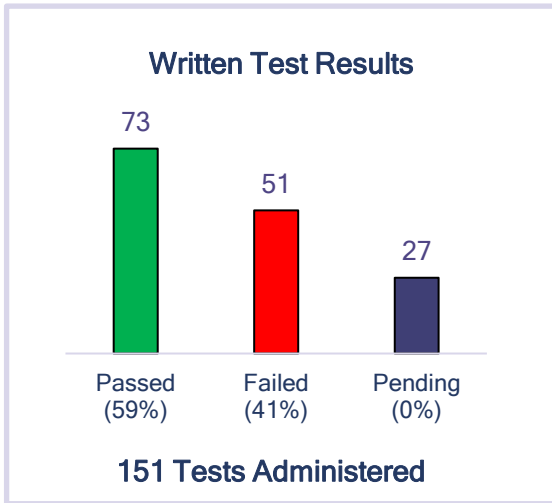


Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI)

The Commission administers the Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification and Testing program. This program offers a state certification option for interpreters seeking to maintain an Illinois sign language interpreter license or to obtain an approval for providing educational interpreting services through the Illinois State Board of Education. The Illinois BEI Testing consists of two testing components. All new applicants must first pass the Written Test before being eligible to apply for any Performance Tests. Available Performance Tests are offered at the Basic, Advanced, and Master levels. To be eligible for the Advanced and Master level Performance Tests, applicants must hold a current qualifying certification.

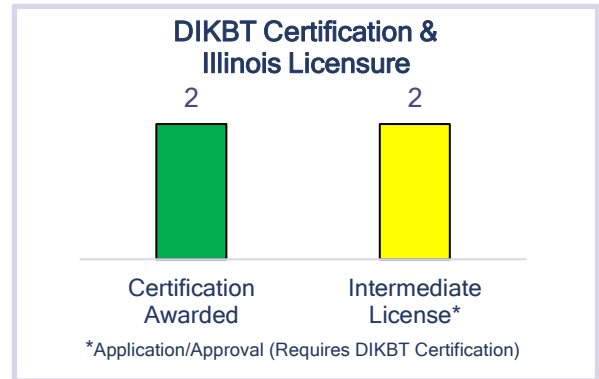
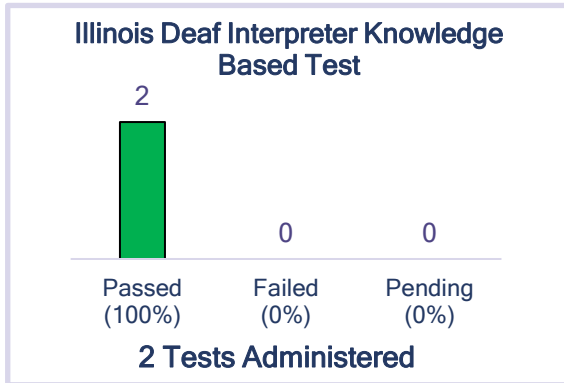
		FY2024	FY2023	FY2022
TESTS ADMINISTERED		257	192	145
Written Tests	Performance Tests	151	106	102
			90	76
				69

FY2024 Illinois BEI Statistics



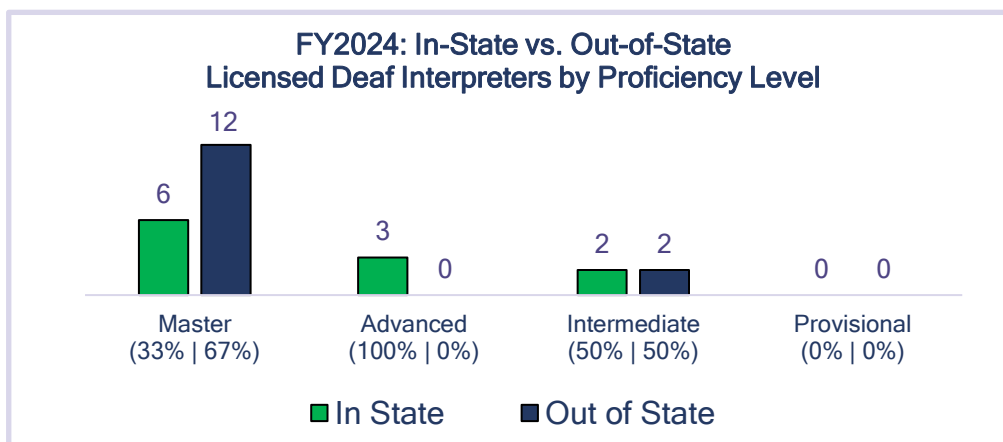
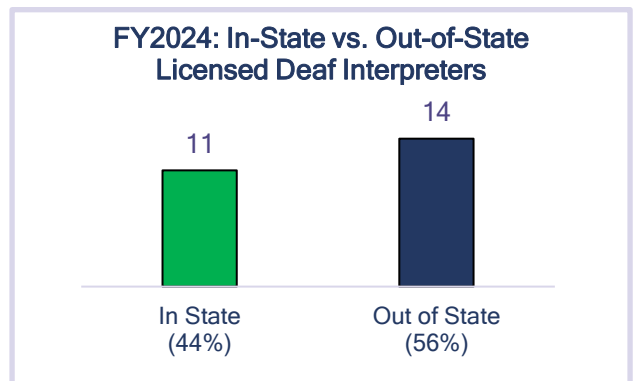
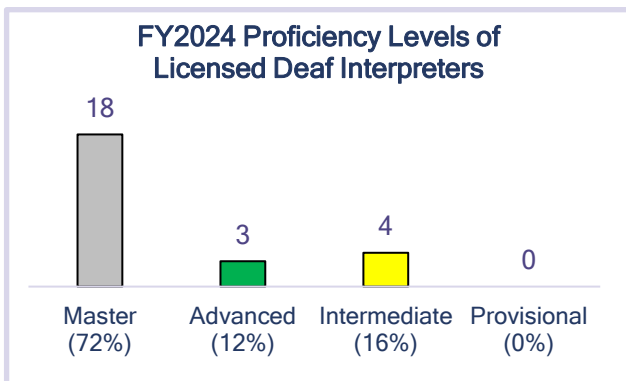
Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Based Test

Following the passage of the Licensure Act, the Illinois Board of Interpreters recognized the need for Licensed Sign Language Interpreters who are Deaf to provide entry-level services. The Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Based Test (DIKBT) was established. As American Sign Language is the primary language of Licensed Deaf Interpreters, the required test is a written exam covering roles and responsibilities under the Act, rather than a skills assessment. Passing this test qualifies an applicant for an applicant to apply for a Sign Language License at an Intermediate Proficiency Level.



Licensed Deaf Sign Language Interpreters

During Fiscal Year 2024, 25 Illinois licenses were held by Deaf Sign Language Interpreters who fulfilled the certification requirements stipulated in the Licensure Act rules. The following provides a breakdown of these Licensed Deaf Interpreters for the fiscal year.





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Electronic Publication available at www.idhhc.illinois.gov

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