



State of Illinois
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Commission



Annual Report 2025

Fiscal Year July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025



State of Illinois
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Commission

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

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JB PRITZKER
GOVERNOR



State of Illinois
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Commission

BENRO T. OLIVES
DIRECTOR

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 2025 Annual Report covering the period from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. This report highlights our work, achievements, and ongoing commitment to serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community across Illinois.

The Commission has completed the first year of its five-year strategic plan and priorities for 2024-2029. A progress report is available on the website, highlighting the goals and objectives achieved during this initial year. To further our commitment to visibility and engagement, the Commission and the Illinois Board of Interpreters meetings were held in Chicago. This marked the first time the board meetings were scheduled on consecutive days, each on a separate day, marking a milestone in collaboration and accessibility.

The Commission continues to address the significant shortage of interpreters statewide. During the fiscal year, I convened a dedicated Stakeholders Advisory Group to develop recommendations addressing the interpreter shortages and strengthening data collection. As these discussions continue, the Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to enhance the effectiveness of interpreter licensing, certification, and testing processes.

I hope you find the annual report, which details the Commission's significant accomplishments, both useful and informative. The Commission looks forward to continued collaboration with state agencies and partnerships with the diverse Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities and stakeholders to remove systemic barriers and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility throughout Illinois.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Benro T. Olives".

Benro T. Olives, Director

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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
Carlos I. Colon	–	Savoy, IL
Wendy Deters	–	Lake Zurich, IL
Michael Dubowe	–	Normal, IL
John R. Jun	–	Minooka, IL
Kimberly Mokris	–	Shorewood, IL
Roy Pyers	–	Williamsville, IL
Jennifer M. Sender	–	Chicago, IL
Joshua D. Sevier	–	Chicago, IL

COMMISSION STAFF

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

Benro T. Olives	–	Director
Patty Greene	–	Chief Operating Officer
Tonia R. Bogener	–	Legal Counsel
Dana Craig	–	Program Coordinator
Lee Taylor	–	Office Assistant
William Lee	–	Interpreter Coordinator



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 was established in 1997 as an executive state agency under the [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission Act](#) (20 ILCS 3932/25). It serves as a coordinating and advocacy body dedicated to representing the interests of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across Illinois. The Commission is charged with eight statutory mandates, and all programs and activities are structured to align with these mandates.

The Commission works collaboratively with state agencies, communities, and stakeholders to remove systemic barriers and advance accessibility for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals statewide. Through technical assistance and training, the Commission promotes effective communication and supports inclusive practices. It also advocates for legislation and policies that reflect the needs of these communities. Additionally, the Commission provides comprehensive statewide resources and maintains an online directory of all licensed sign language interpreters in Illinois.

In addition, the Commission serves as the regulatory authority for licensing sign language interpreters under the Illinois Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007. The Commission administers the Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification and Testing Program, as well as the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge-Based Test.

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 Commission's five-year strategic plan and priorities document is available on the website in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. A Progress Report is also available online to track progress toward the plan's goals and objectives.

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 2025, the Commission responded to nearly 19,000 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 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

Community Outreach & Collaboration

During Fiscal Year 2025, the Commission continued to expand its outreach and collaboration efforts by participating in a variety of community and conference events, including the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Conference in Chicago, IL; the Deaf and Hearing Interpreter Team Training at Columbia College Chicago; the ASL Pop-Up at Illinois State University in Normal, IL; the DeafNation Expo in Chicago, IL; the Illinois Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ITDHH) Conference in Naperville, IL; CHAMPS (Continually Honing Advocacy Makes Prizewinners) in Joliet, IL; the Career Spark STEAM Expo in Springfield, IL; and the Institute for Parents of Preschool Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Jacksonville, IL. The Commission collaborated with the Chicago Hearing Society to provide training to the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence on culturally responsive services for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind. Additionally, the Director convened a Stakeholders Advisory Group to develop recommendations on addressing the interpreter shortage and improving data collection.



Photos: IDHHC table booth at the Career Spark STEAM Expo in Springfield, Illinois, held April 29–30, 2025.

Technical Assistance, Consultation, & Training Support

The Commission provides technical assistance, consultation, and training to enhance communication access within public and private programs and services for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind. In Fiscal Year 2025, the Commission successfully collaborated with multiple state agencies to improve and update effective communication strategies across programs and services serving Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. Notable collaborations included the Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services - Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, and the Illinois Department of Insurance. The Commission also provided technical assistance to the newly established Illinois Department of Early Childhood.

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 individuals 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.



Commission
Meeting
in Chicago on
March 27, 2025

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



The Commission's meeting agendas and minutes for both upcoming and past meetings are accessible on the website. Information on submitting public comments and requesting reasonable accommodations to attend the meetings is also available.



COMMISSION STATISTICS

	FY2025	FY2024	FY2023
Public Inquiry Responses	18,970	24,370	24,097
Educational and Informational Materials Provided	24,550	28,990	17,414
Participants in Professional Interpreter Development Opportunities	120*	702	610
Communication Visor Cards	2,600	5,760	413
Electronic Communications Contacts	1,600	1,050	739

*This decrease was due to the cancellation or reduction of professional development opportunities offered.

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 achieved with the passage of [Public Act 103-0530](#), which amended the Insurance Hearing Aid Coverage law. Effective January 1, 2025, insurance companies regulated under the Illinois Department of Insurance are now required to provide coverage for medically prescribed hearing aids and related services for individuals of all ages, ensuring broader access to essential care. This update replaces the previous age-restricted coverage, which applied only to individuals under 18 and those 65 or older. For additional information on related bills and resolutions, please visit the Commission's website.

Stay Connected with IDHHC Communications



Sign up to receive news, updates, and monthly eCommunications directly in your inbox! Click here: [Sign Up for IDHHC Communications](#) or scan QR code on the left.



idhhc.illinois.gov



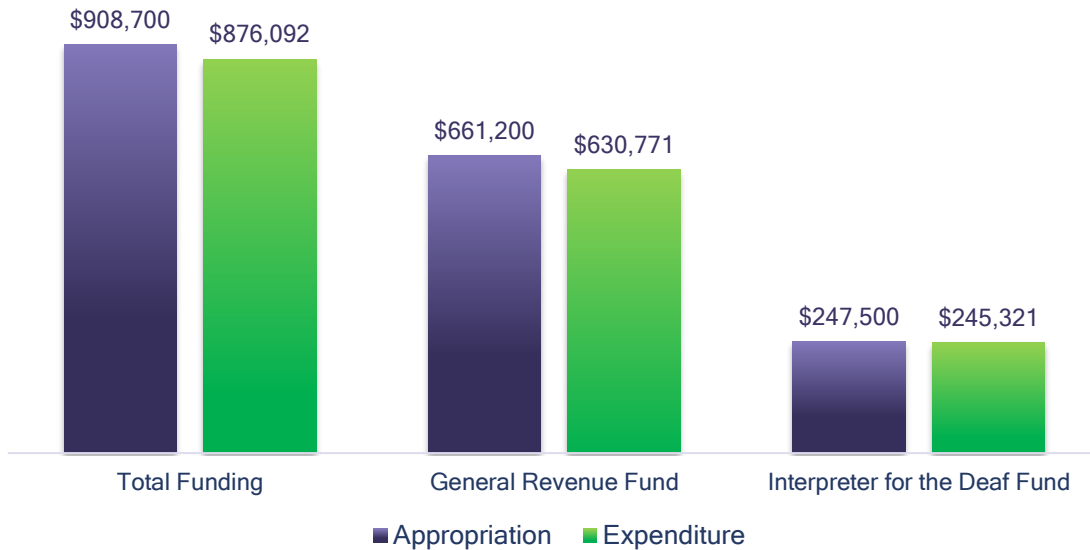
DHH.Communications@Illinois.gov



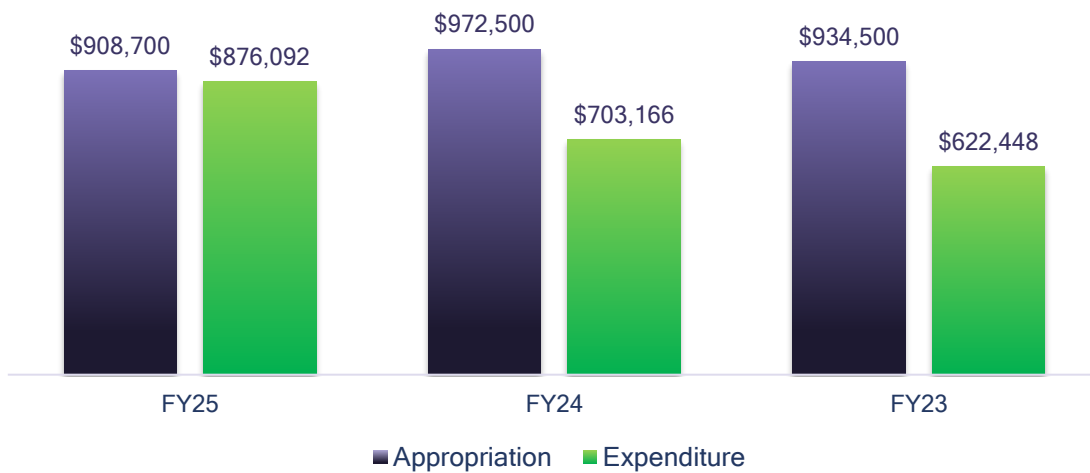
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APPROPRIATIONS & EXPENDITURES

Fiscal Year 2025 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.

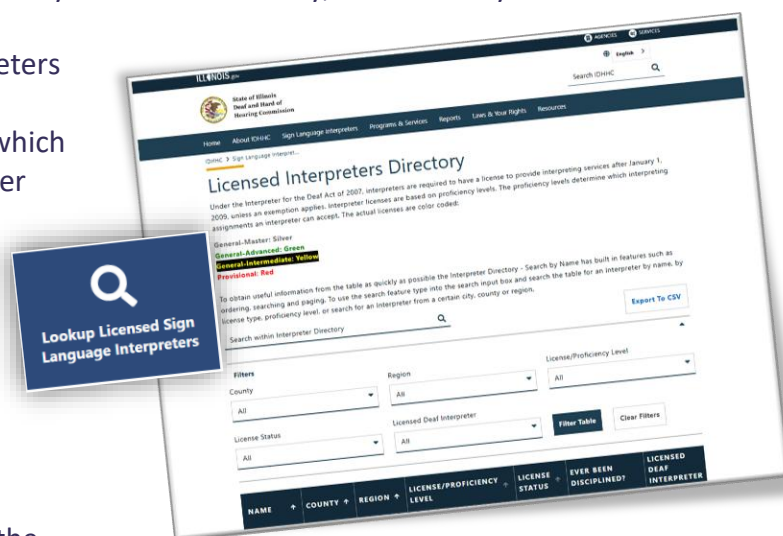
**Illinois Board of
Interpreters
Meeting
in Chicago on
March 28, 2025**



Illinois Licensed Interpreters Directory

All sign language interpreter licenses must be publicly listed in a directory, as statutorily required by the Licensure Act. The Commission maintains an online directory of licensed interpreters to facilitate the hiring of qualified professionals. Licenses are issued based on proficiency levels, which determine the types of assignments an interpreter may accept. Each license type is color-coded for easy identification:

-  **General–Master (Silver)**
-  **General–Advanced (Green)**
-  **General–Intermediate (Yellow)**
-  **Provisional (Red)**



The online directory allows users to quickly find the information they need. It offers convenient features such as sorting, keyword searches, and export search results. Users can search by interpreter name, license type, proficiency level, or filter results by region, county, or city.

New Online Test Application Launched

No more paper applications! The Commission has a new online test application for both the Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) and the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge-Based Test (DIKBT). The testing schedule is available online allowing applicants to select an available testing date after the application is approved. This new initiative supports publicly accessibility including completing the application through smartphones and receiving notification electronically. The Commission remains committed to strengthening interpreter licensing, certification, and testing processes as part of its five-year strategic plan and priorities.

2025 Professional Interpreter Development Opportunities

The Commission hosted Deaf Interpreter Training (see page 11 for more information) for prospective Deaf Interpreters as well as Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) preparation workshops for sign language interpreter students, licensed sign language interpreters, and educational interpreters. A total of three (3) BEI certification preparation workshops were offered, featuring a diverse range of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and hearing presenters and trainers: Preparing for the BEI Test of English Proficiency; Preparing for the BEI Basic Performance Test; and Preparing for the BEI Advanced Performance Test. A total of 120 participants attended, receiving 42 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.

**2025 Professional
Interpreter Development
Workshops**

120

Total Participants

42

**CE Hours
Offered**

Deaf Interpreter Training

The Commission hosted Deaf Interpreter Training to promote the growth of the pool of qualified Deaf Interpreters in Illinois. A Deaf Interpreter (DI) is a Deaf or hard of hearing professional who provides specialized interpreting, translation, and transliteration services in American Sign Language and other visual or tactual communication modes to bridge communication gaps for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals with diverse linguistic, cultural, and lived backgrounds.

The Commission is proud to report that 24 participants successfully completed the two-day training held on April 25–26, 2025. Additionally, 16 individuals passed the Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge-Based Test on April 27, 2025, with five more participants passing during the retake exams. All are now eligible to become Licensed Deaf Interpreters and are ready to begin their professional journeys. The Commission gratefully acknowledges the Illinois State Board of Education for its support through the grant project, which made this training possible.



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

1023

Illinois Licensed Interpreters

101

New Licenses

897

License Renewals

25

Restored Licenses

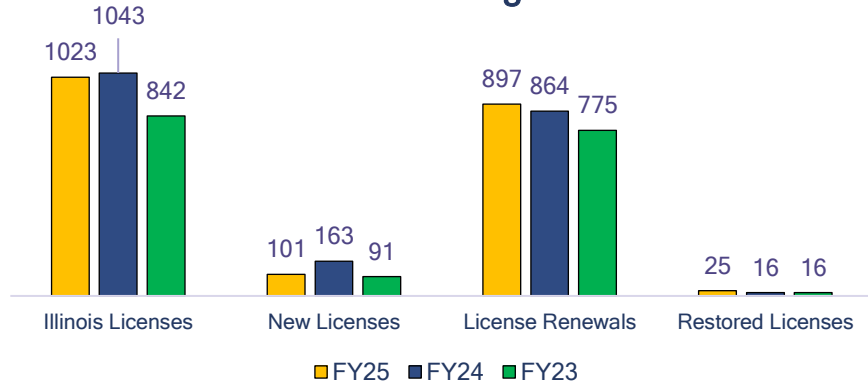
14

Proficiency Level Upgrades

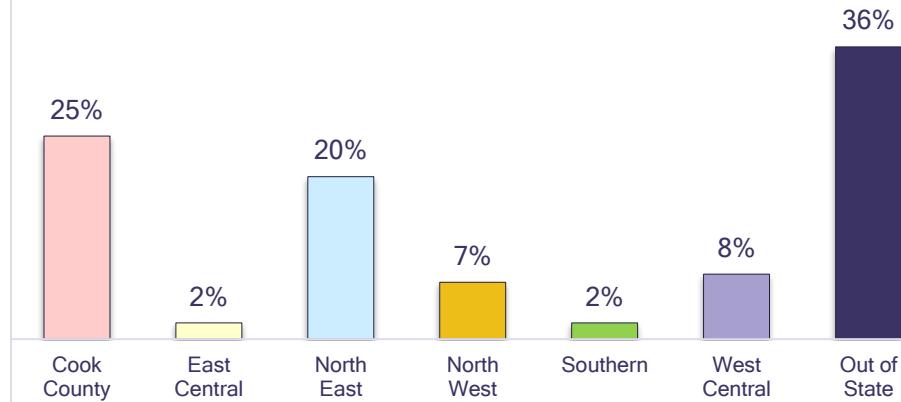
Fact:

The number of Licensed Deaf Interpreters increased by 44%, from 25 in FY2024 to 36 in FY2025. See page 14 for additional highlights and statistics on Licensed Deaf Interpreters.

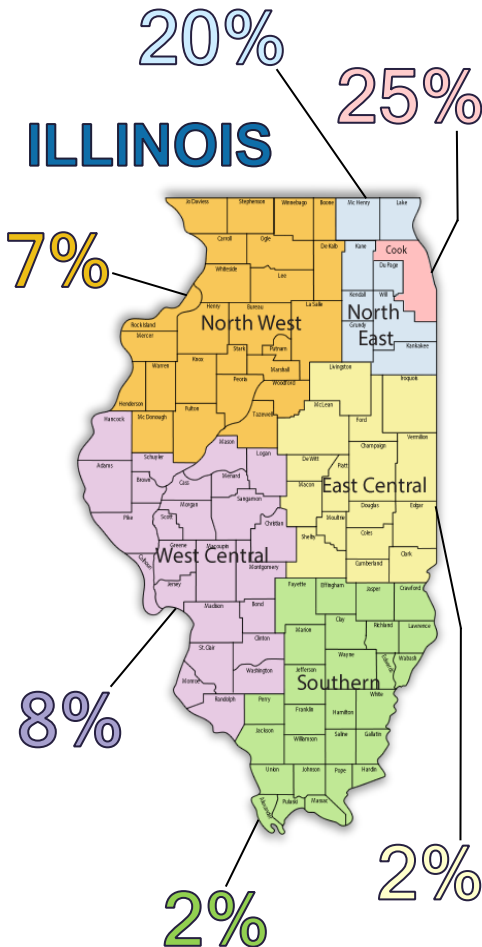
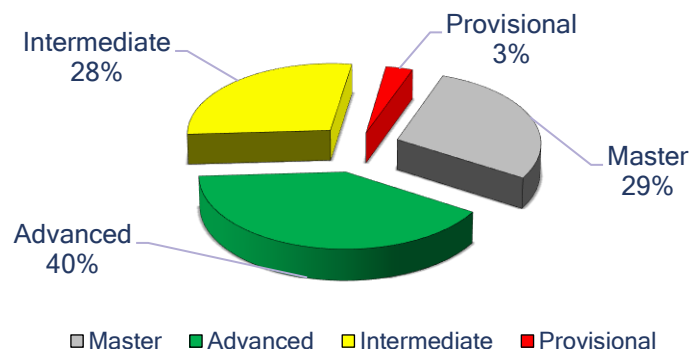
Historical Licensing Statistics



FY2025 Licensed Interpreters by Region



FY2025 Licenses by Proficiency Level

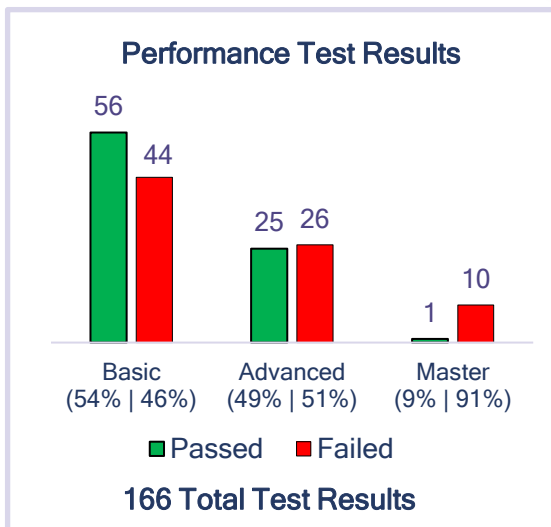
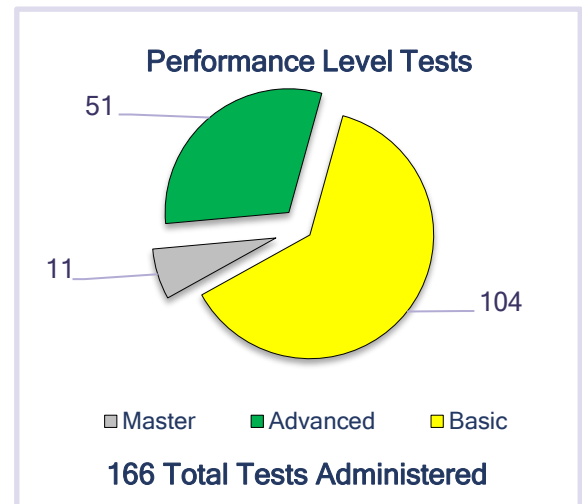
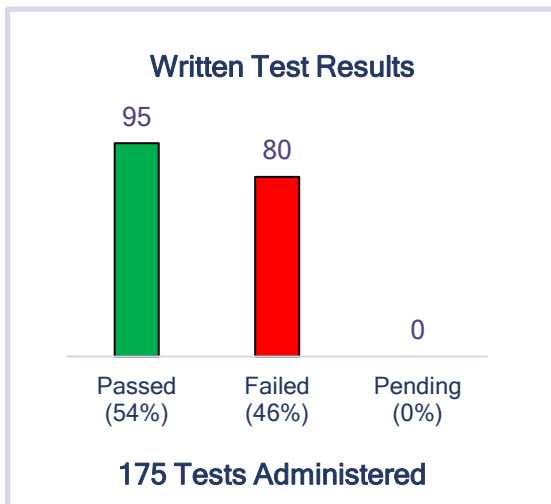


Illinois Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI)

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: a Written Test and Performance Test. All new applicants must first pass the Written Test before being eligible to apply for any Performance Tests. Performance Tests are available at three levels: Basic, Advanced, and Master. To be eligible for the Advanced and Master level Performance Tests, applicants must hold a current qualifying certification.

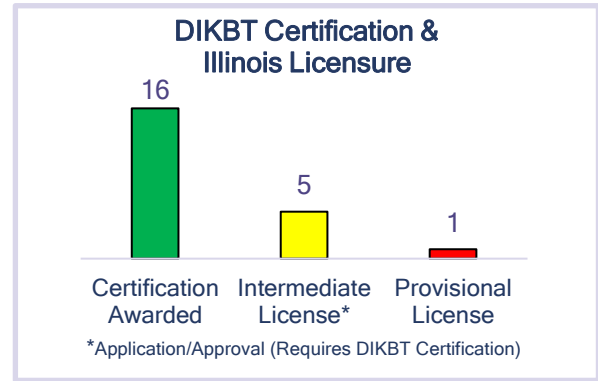
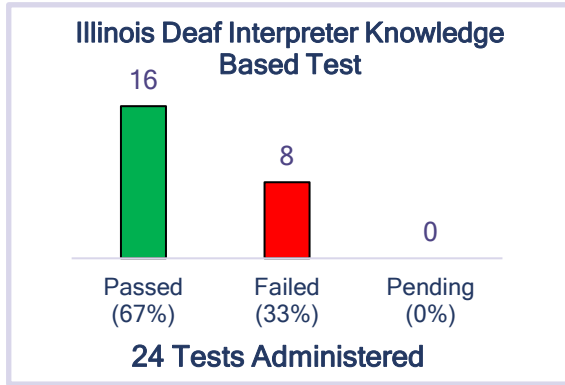
		FY2025		FY2024		FY2023	
TESTS ADMINISTERED		341		257		192	
Written Tests	Performance Tests	175	166	151	106	102	90

FY2025 Illinois BEI Statistics



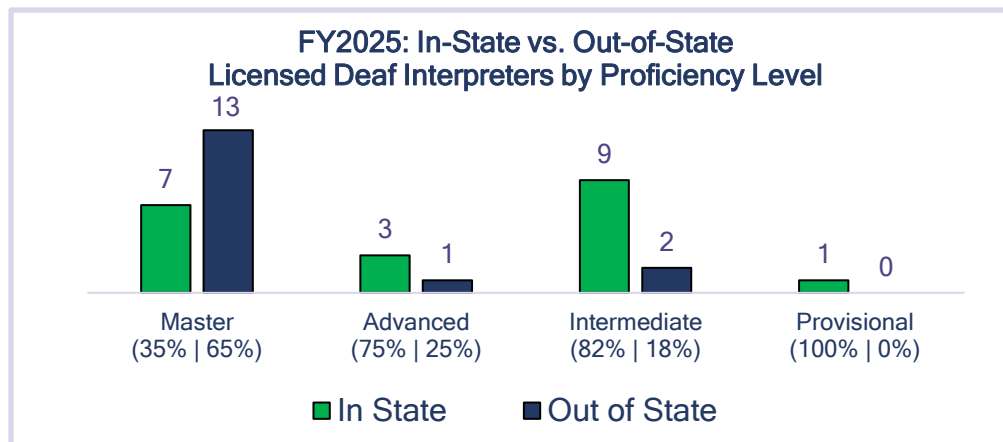
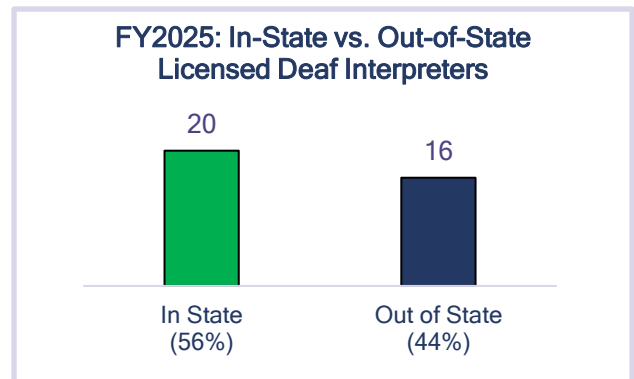
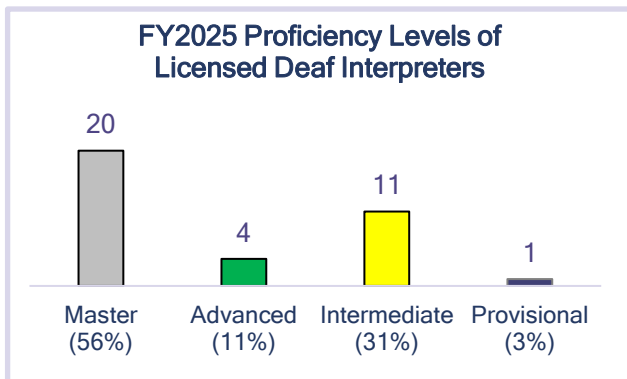
Illinois Deaf Interpreter Knowledge Based Test

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 2025, 36 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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