



*"The world has watched the deaf community come of age. Together we've overcome our own reluctance to stand up for our own rights."*

— Dr. I. King Jordan, President Emeritus, Gallaudet University

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Office of the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission  
Attn: John Miller  
528 South Fifth Street, Suite 209  
Springfield, Illinois 62701

Dear Director Miller –

On behalf of the Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD), I write this letter as a follow-up to the one sent to you on June 23, 2016. To date, we have not received a response from you, your colleagues and commissioners of the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) in regards to the concerns expressed about the IDHHC's lack of community engagement and inclusiveness. Our concerns are furthered by the IDHHC's absence at the National Association of the Deaf Conference and the National Deaf Education Conference (NDEC) currently taking place. This absence is a stark contrast from the statement your organization made in the June "Communication Matters" issue released by the IDHHC.

As you have seen, the IAD does not stand alone in our concerns. We've seen letters be sent to your office from multiple organizations, including the Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association (ISDAA), Jacksonville Community Center for the Deaf (JCCD), Jacksonville Chapter of the Illinois Association of the Deaf, Fox Valley Chapter of the Illinois Association of the Deaf and Task Force Team. Additionally, the countless individuals that sent letters directly to your office have relentlessly backed all these organizations.

It is unfortunate the IAD is not surprised by your actions and recent decisions regarding the ISD superintendent search steering committee. These are indicative of the cyclical behavior under your leadership and direction in which the IDHHC has consistently, knowingly and intentionally failed to represent the Deaf community, those who rely on sign language as their mode of communication, because the IDHHC does not want to create controversy or be in the middle of a dispute. This unwillingness to advocate on the behalf of the Deaf community has come at a large expense to the Deaf community, one that remains ignored and marginalized by the very commission it lobbied legislators to establish.

We understand and are not opposed to the need to support a wide variety of issues to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals; however, the IDHHC has continuously spent time on issues that have minimal impact on the Deaf community and opposes issues and legislation the community wants or needs.

- HB 5002 – A bill amending the health insurance code requiring health insurance companies to provide coverage for hearing instruments and related services for individuals who received a cochlear implant. There has been no advocating or proposed amendment from the IDHHC to provide hearing aid coverage and related services to all individuals with hearing loss.
- HB 5033 – A bill mandating each qualifying movie theater operates with a certain number of closed captioning devices at any given time. The IDHHC supported this bill despite the bill not doing anything to enhance the accessibility already in place for most theaters in Illinois. At the same time, the IDHHC did not seek out the community's input, including that of IAD, in which we lobbied to expand the mandate to increase accessibility at movie theaters.

- The IDHHC's primary focus and emphasis has been non-deaf interpreters. The IDHHC has focused on providing professional development opportunities, expanding certification testing capabilities and regulating licenses. The IDHHC has also focused on expanding opportunities for cued speech transliterates in Illinois. Consequently, there has been an insufficient focus on providing training opportunities for deaf interpreters in Illinois and creating awareness of the need for these interpreters to successfully facilitate communication. An increase of the pool of interpreters lower under and unemployment rates while increasing communication access experiences for many in the deaf and hard of hearing community, including DeafBlind individuals. The IDHHC was established to serve the deaf and hard of hearing community, not hearing interpreters.

This is only a short list of the many opportunities for the IDHHC to take a position to support the community it is supposed to serve. Instead of attending hearings, providing amendments or testifying in support or opposition of bills, the IDHHC continues to simply "monitor legislation."

We know more is possible. It begins with the eradication of the following statement often made by the commission: "the Governor's office says we cannot do that." We look at several states as a model and epitome of progression, including Arizona, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska and New Mexico. Unlike your office, these offices have collaborated heavily with their local communities and have been heavily involved in advocating for continuous legislation and initiatives to be acted on in order to improve the lives of all deaf and hard of hearing in their respective states.

The IDHHC must commit itself to make actual systematic changes and ensure that the state of Illinois, non-deaf individuals and service providers, not only hear, but also listen to the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing community you are supposed to serve. The status quo of continuously forming task forces and committees, much like the steering committee for the ISD Superintendent search, and developing endless recommendations is unacceptable. These make the IDHHC look like it did something when it reality, it did nothing to create actual equality, respect, accessibility and independence for all individuals who are supposed to be served by the commission.

Sincerely,



Corey Axelrod  
President  
Illinois Association of the Deaf

cc: Evelyn Sanguinetti, Lieutenant Governor, State of Illinois  
Dr. Beth Purvis, Secretary of Education, State of Illinois  
Gregory Bassi, Chief of Staff, State of Illinois  
Theresa Fuller-Sakolsky, Commission Chair, Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission  
James Dimas, Department of Human Services Secretary, State of Illinois  
Kevin Ryan, Vice President, Illinois Association of the Deaf  
Shelley Williams, Secretary, Illinois Association of the Deaf  
Lisa Roth, Treasurer, Illinois Association of the Deaf  
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