



"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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

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Corey Axelrod
president@iadeaf.org

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vicepresident@iadeaf.org

207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

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secretary@iadeaf.org

Dear Governor Rauner:

Treasurer

Lisa Roth
treasurer@iadeaf.org

As we have not received a reply to our letter dated January 17, 2017, we write again to reiterate the concerns regarding the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC). We have been getting the impression that IDHHC staff members have been misleading your administration regarding the current state of the IDHHC, but the all-encompassing and aforementioned concerns in our initial letter necessitate your attention.

Membership Secretary

Susan Dramin-Weiss
membership@iadeaf.org

In your State of the State speech delivered on January 25, 2017, you addressed your Reform Agenda extensively and shared your "administration has made education from cradle to career a top priority." In our initial letter, we addressed the IDHHC's lack of action in addressing concerns raised by the Joint Task Force for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Options in the Early Intervention and Education reports delivered in 2007 and 2008, respectively. It is paramount to acknowledge the task force was composed of individuals with extensive expertise in education and early intervention; once the recommendations were turned over to IDHHC for execution, the IDHHC failed largely in part due to incompetence impacting their ability to address the recommendations. Consequently, as shared in our initial letter, the state's burden will continue to rise.

Incompetence and lack of activity at the IDHHC continue to be the norm, a trend predating you becoming our Governor. More specifically, the issue of incompetence is a byproduct of a top-heavy agency of five people where the director and assistant director lack appropriate collegiate credentials. In Dean Olsen's "Dissatisfaction continues over agency serving deaf Illinoisans" article published on November 20, 2016 in the State Journal-Register, IDHHC spokeswoman Veronica Vera verified the IDHHC director only holds an associate's degree in applied accounting and the assistant director holds a high school diploma and only completed several college-level courses.

Despite the community raising concerns for more than a year, the IDHHC staff and commissioners have continued to disregard the mandates established in law and consistently demonstrate they are out of touch and indifferent to the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community's current needs and concerns. Meanwhile, the shortage of qualified Deaf Educators and educational interpreters in Illinois continue to worsen, subpar education and services for Deaf, DeafBlind and hard of Hearing remain, the rates of under and unemployment for deaf and hard of hearing individuals will continue to exceed the national rate, communication access for senior citizens in senior living facilities remain dismal, rules and regulations for interpreter licenses are not regularly maintained and updated, and complaints against interpreters remain unresolved. IDHHC's continued lack of interagency collaboration, advocacy and ensuring accessible services are provided to the greater community leaves not only Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing community at risk, but also leave the state and other entities vulnerable to potential lawsuits and complaints filed, including the complaint the Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD) lodged against the Governor's Office for inaccessible Facebook live feeds. Subsequently, the IDHHC's inactivity could essentially increase costs taxpayers are burdened with; increased costs are a continued issue and concern you and your constituents share.

To our collective concern, instead of assuming responsibility or implementing strategic initiatives to alleviate concerns, the IDHHC has publicly deflected blame on your and previous Governors' administrations, a lack of funding and staff members, and other excuses for not being able to satisfy the mandates. We respect the position the IDHHC is in as they are running with limited funds and resources, but look at the State of Maryland's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing and other Commissions serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as models of providing adequate services with limited funding and resources at their disposal. On the contrary, the IDHHC is not using state resources adequately; one example is a significant amount of IDHHC's staffing and resources, paid for by the General Revenue Fund, is being expended to manage interpreter licenses while the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007 designates funds from the Interpreter for the Deaf Fund to be utilized for this work. Consequently, this creates a continuous void and neglect of the IDHHC's core duties under the IDHHC, a telling sign the agency's incompetence contributes to the agency's overall ineffectiveness. In alignment with your recent State of the State address, the IDHHC is a broken agency in need of fundamental changes.

You have the ability to appoint appropriate and qualified individuals who have already applied and can appropriately steer the IDHHC to ensure mandates established in law are satisfied by means of requiring a plan of action to respond to calls for improvements. We also hope you would support SB0752 as it is an attempt to comprehensively reform and ensure the IDHHC optimally serves the greater community. We look forward to hearing from a representative of your office to set up a time for representatives of IAD to meet with you to discuss needed reform at IDHHC.

Sincerely,



Corey Axelrod
President
Illinois Association of the Deaf
president@iadeaf.org



Kevin Ryan
Vice President
Illinois Association of the Deaf
vicepresident@iadeaf.org

cc: Richard Goldberg, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
Julie A. Morrison, Senator, Illinois State Senate
William McCann, Senator, Illinois State Senate
Howard A. Rosenblum, Chief Executive Officer, National Association of the Deaf
Melissa Draganac-Hawk, President, National Association of the Deaf