



IRID

Illinois Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

President

William Lee

William Lee
PO BOX 4584
Oak Brook, IL 60522

February 21, 2017

Vice-President

Amanda Grazian

The Honorable Julie A. Morrison
M115 Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Treasurer

Suzanne Salerno

Dear Senator Morrison:

My name is William Lee, President of the Illinois Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (IRID). We are a member organization made up of over 300 professional American Sign Language interpreters, students, educators and allies. I am writing to share IRID's position on SB0752 and HB1811. The interpreting profession may be impacted by SB0752 proposed changes to *The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission Act (20 ILCS 3932)*. We would like to address specific areas of concern to SB0752 and to offer general comment.

- **Section 15 Commission Membership (a) confirmation by the Senate** – the IRID has concerns that this could cause delays in filling commission positions. The current process to appoint Commissioners is already lengthy with seats remaining vacant. Requiring Senate confirmation would further lengthen the overall process.
- **Section 15 Commission Membership (a) criteria for commissioners** – At face value, it makes sense to delineate the membership of the commission to be of a diverse makeup. This does however create the potential to limit the applicant pool for some commission seats, leaving them unfilled for longer time periods or even permanently vacant.
- **Section 20 Director qualifications** - The Commission serves all Illinois citizens who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind, regardless of language or modality of communication. Requiring fluency in ASL does not need to be explicitly stated in the law in our opinion. Some community members have expressed the belief that this section is an attempt to remove current IDHHC leadership which may or may not be the intent.
- **Section 25 (and others) DeafBlind** – IRID applauds the addition of language inclusive of the DeafBlind. The DeafBlind community is vastly different from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community in many ways. We would encourage that people who are DeafBlind express their position directly. The state had previously established an Advisory Board for Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals as well as a DeafBlind Support Service Provider Task Force. The Chicagoland DeafBlind Alliance, another membership organization, could provide valuable input to SB0752.

Member-At-Large

Cathy Silvern

Member-At-Large

Mary Kocsis

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Susan Sotnick

Student Rep

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- **Section 25 (9).** At this time, the scope and impact of this particular added section is most concerning and unclear to IRID. We do not know how this would fiscally impact the IDHHC or other agencies currently providing direct services (i.e. Centers for Independent Living, Legal and Advocacy Agencies, Social Service Agencies, etc.)

IRID is fully in support of HB1811 extending the sunset period for *The Interpreter Licensure for the Deaf Act of 2007*. At this time, we do not recommend any changes to governance or to the department which processes interpreting licenses. IRID was recently made aware of a recommendation that IDFPR be designated to handle licensing of interpreters. At this time, IRID does not support this type of change. We would need to do additional research and to gather member feedback. While the extension of the *Interpreter Licensure Act* is urgent in order to maintain high quality standards in the provision of quality interpreting service and to protect consumers, we feel that it would be unwise to make additional changes at this time without due diligence and solicitation of feedback from all stakeholders involved.

I agree that the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission has struggled this past year. They have reportedly been difficult to contact at times or may not have been as active as some hoped. IRID takes the position that many of the issues noted could be addressed without legislative prescription.

IRID is not defending the actions or inactions of the IDHHC. We realize there is always room for improvement and we advocate for any changes that will positively impact our respective communities. IRID believes however that external factors should be taken into consideration when evaluating the agency's performance over this past year. The ongoing Illinois budget crisis has had a substantial impact on the agency's ability to fulfill its mission and meet obligations. The IDHHC has operated insufficiently staffed during this time due to vacancies, hiring restrictions and having various staff on medical leave multiple times. The remaining staff were forced to redirect energies to meet continued workload demands. The agency also continued to operate while being portrayed negatively in both print and social media. Some of IRID's members have expressed concerns about negative publicity campaigns. IRID fully supports and respects the Deaf Community and we wish to work together to advocate for effective change in a positive manner.

The IRID has established a workgroup to focus on legislative issues. Thank you for your support of interpreters and for the work of your office to provide equal access for persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. If you would like to discuss our recommendations further, we can be reached at 773.983.8638 or via email at legislative@irid.org.

Sincerely,

William E. Lee, President