



*"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**

Friday, February 24, 2017

**President**

Corey Axelrod  
president@iadeaf.org

The Honorable Julie A. Morrison

M115 Capitol Building

Springfield, IL 62706

**Vice President**

Kevin Ryan  
vicepresident@iadeaf.org

Dear Senator Morrison:

**Secretary**

Shelley Williams  
secretary@iadeaf.org

The Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD) received a copy of the letter submitted to your office on February 21, 2017 by William Lee, President of the Illinois Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (IRID). This letter details IRID's position on SB0752 and HB1811. I am hereby writing this response to alert you to some concerning statements made in this letter.

**Treasurer**

Lisa Roth  
treasurer@iadeaf.org

SB0752 should not and does not impact the interpreting profession. HB1811 does. If IRID is concerned about the potential impact of SB0752 on the interpreting community, this underpins our position that the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) has deviated from their primary duties of serving Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Illinoisans. The IDHHC is devoting a significant amount of time to the interpreter licensing process. This also reinforces our preliminary dialogue with members of the General Assembly addressing the need for reevaluation of the existing processes in place and consideration of shifting management of interpreter licensures to IDFPR. The potential benefits could be two-fold: 1) this would free up time the IDHHC staff could spend serving the population the commission was originally established to serve and 2) the interpreting profession would benefit from the IDFPR's expertise, infrastructure, standardized procedures and consistent, unbiased regulation.

**Membership Secretary**

Susan Dramin-Weiss  
membership@iadeaf.org

We agree with President Lee that it is a disappointment the IDHHC has not filled all its vacant commissioner positions. However, these vacancies are not a result of a lack of qualified candidates for the position over the past few years. We are fully aware of highly qualified applicants, including those with advanced degrees, specific positions and experience enabling them to competently represent the concerns, needs and recommendations of deaf and hard of hearing persons, are being passed up for commissioner appointments in favor of those who support Director Miller. At the same time, commissioners who are more vocal and raise concerns regarding the IDHHC's shortcomings are being quickly replaced. All in all, the Governor's Office has received enough qualified applicants to fill the two current vacant commissioner positions and two expired terms.

In developing the recommended composition for the commissioners, we researched other boards and commissions in Illinois, including the Illinois Council for Disabilities. We found many that have detailed qualifications for commissioner positions and require senate confirmation do not experience lengthy unfilled vacancies like IDHHC does. We also researched other state commissions and offices for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a majority have detailed position qualifications as well. As it stands right now, we believe all but one of the current commissioners would fall under one of the proposed categories, including the licensed interpreter category. Furthermore, per our analysis of how many individuals would be qualified to fill the positions as proposed, we are confident that there are ample applicants for each category and positions will be filled.

On a separate note, the IAD respectfully disagrees with the IRID's position on the Director's Qualifications (Section 20), including the removal of American Sign Language (ASL) fluency as a requirement. The current director is a fluent ASL signer, much like many of the directors of other state commissions and offices for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Removal of this requirement could be

perceived as a disrespect shown towards the Deaf community; ASL is a critical component of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community and possessing ASL fluency will serve the IDHHC Director well in his/her role when working with the community at large. Last, but not least, the proposed amendments, as written, are by no means an attempt to remove the current Director from his position, but to ensure the statute remains in line with current standards in state government.

President Lee references concerns about struggles over the past year, but does not acknowledge the continuous concerns the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community has raised over the past several years regarding the IDHHC. As the IRID does not represent the Deaf community, we believe the IRID may not have the same visibility the IAD has regarding these issues. All the while, 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 individuals 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.

More specifically, members of the Chicagoland DeafBlind Alliance and the DeafBlind Community expressed concern regarding the lack of Support Service Professionals (SSPs) serving the DeafBlind subset of the community, hence our insistence of adding language to ensure the IDHHC provides services to the DeafBlind community. Additionally, advocates at Center for Independent Living (CILs) have also shared their concerns about referring their clients to the IDHHC for state-level advocacy services only to have these clients be turned away by IDHHC staff members. This is of concern because IDHHC is regarded as the state-level expert and the "gatekeeper" to other state agencies and programs. The inclusion of this language should not adversely impact CILs' ability to provide advocacy services for their clients but rather enhance the overall services provided to the community at large. In the same vein of President Lee's argument, IDHHC currently provides referral services and it should have adversely affected CILs' ability to perform information and referral services, which is not the case. Additionally, "direct services" is not new to IDHHC. These services are in Director Miller's job description, but not carried out. These additional clarification language and areas of emphasis are necessary as it is the legislative intent to ensure that Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Illinoisans' rights are protected and their welfare promoted.

The issues raised are not a recent phenomenon, but a long-term, sustained problem that existed before the staff vacancies and budget crisis occurred. In comparison with other State Commissions and Offices for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the outcomes from the IDHHC are woefully inadequate. Before seeking legislative change, the IAD made numerous efforts since June 2015 to reach out to IDHHC to discuss how IDHHC and IAD could work together, but was turned away and dismissed. As a result, our Association provided your office with suggestions for true reform, ones that would position the IDHHC for long-term, sustained success.

Sincerely,

Corey Axelrod  
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Illinois Association of the Deaf  
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Jason Altmann  
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