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December 26, 2017

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Dear Hon. Governor Rauner:

Membership Secretary

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During our correspondences with members of the General Assembly, we learned it is your desire, and possibly your intention, to move the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) under the purview of Department of Human Services (DHS) and the management of Interpreter Licensure to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (DFPR). We understand and appreciate there are perceived operational and financial efficiencies to be realized by such moves, but have a number of concerns and recommendations for your consideration.

Chicago Chapter of IAD

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As our association has shared with your office, the concerns raised pertaining the IDHHC is not of a recent phenomenon, but a long-term, sustained problem existing before the staff's vacancies and current state budget crisis. Furthermore, the original statute creating the IDHHC is outdated and contributes to IDHHC's ineffective management and inadequate delivery of services to Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Illinoisans. There is need for agency reform, and this is why members of the deaf community worked with legislators to introduce Senate Bill 752 (SB752) earlier this year.

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Sweeping reform where the needs of the very community the IDHHC is supposed to serve gets lost in an agency the size of DHS is not ideal. The IDHHC was established as an executive agency of the Governor's Office to ensure the collective interests of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Illinoisans regarding communication access, education, employment, healthcare and technology are represented among Illinois' policy makers, including state legislators and executive agencies of the Governor's Office. It is our intention to restore the integrity and purpose of the agency's formation and existence.

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Decisions made by DHS for IDHHC would be far less efficient and effective than decisions made by competent and qualified commissioners; DHS leadership does not have the necessary cultural competence and linguistic knowledge to appropriately and effectively lead, advise and supervise the IDHHC. The unnecessary red tape bureaucracy at DHS also could negate efficiency realized by moving IDHHC under DHS' control. Any decision the IDHHC Director intends to make, including hiring, purchasing, submitting budget requests, developing/approving policies, and so forth must be vetted and approved by DHS. Collectively, a move under DHS would potentially mean the collective interests of this already marginalized community would get lost in the shuffle, much like the Illinois School for the Deaf (ISD) has under DHS' control.

We are in the position we are in today largely because of commissioners' dereliction of their

fiduciary responsibilities of supervising and evaluating the IDHHC and ensuring the agency satisfies the mandates established and outlined in 20 ILCS 3932. We recommend filling vacant commissioner positions and replacing all the commissioners who are now serving expired terms with qualified and competent individuals who have diverse professional and educational backgrounds that will best enable them to represent concerns, needs and recommendations of the population the commissioners are supposed to represent. The current make-up of the commission is not reflective of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community or the professionals that serve the community in question, and that's one of the reasons we proposed language to reform the make-up of the commission in SB752.

A fully represented commission, one with qualified and competent individuals, would then be able to reevaluate priorities, revisit IDHHC's currently inadequate strategic plan and hire a director with the appropriate skillset to accomplish the objectives set forth in the strategic plan. However, there are two position vacancies, separate from the Director position that has yet to be posted, in which the IDHHC staff members are looking to fill. This is counterintuitive and ineffective as a permanent director should be the one making the hires, not the interim director.

Last, but not least, prior to the IDHHC assuming responsibilities of managing interpreter licensure in accordance to the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007, the IDHHC satisfied the mandates established in law. Upon the implementation date of January 1, 2009, the IDHHC ceased to satisfy the mandates and claimed budget cuts as a reason for not providing services and activities. However, per the Office of Management and Budget, the enacted appropriation to the IDHHC remained steady or increased since FY 2010 (excluding the period of where no budget was in place).

The IDHHC, with appropriate leadership and management, should in theory be able to appropriately and effectively manage Interpreter Licensure. As members of a linguistic and cultural minority, our utmost concern is communication access standards are not compromised. This requires necessary cultural competence to mediate the issues impacting the deaf and interpreting communities. To this end, we are not in favor of a move of interpreter licensure to DFPR. If a move is necessitated, we posit the integrity of the Interpreter Licensure Board and current licensure standards are maintained or strengthened. We also recommend representatives from the Illinois Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and Illinois Association of the Deaf be a part of the dialogue regarding any proposed changes to interpreter licensure, especially as these changes could impact members of our respective communities.

With our proposed recommendations taking effect, we foresee the IDHHC becoming a well-run agency that effectively collaborates with other state agencies to affect positive changes in Illinois and decreasing the burden of our community on the state.

Thank you considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Illinois Association of the Deaf Board of Directors

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Cc:

Senator Julie A. Morrison (via email)

Representative C.D. Davidsmeyer (via email)

Senator Sam McCann (via email)

Representative Michelle Mussman (via email)

Mr. Andrew Perkins, Chief Senate Liaison (via email)

Mr. Chris Kantas, Policy Advisor (via email)

Mr. Andrés J. Gallegos, Esq., Robbins, Salomon & Patt, Ltd.
(via email)

Commissioners at the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Commission (via email)

Mr. Joe Linder, President, Association of Late Deafened
Adults (ALDA) Chicago (via email)

Mr. Bryen Yunashko, President, Chicagoland DeafBlind
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Ms. Deirdre Keane, President, Hearing Loss Association of
America, Chicago Lincoln Park Chapter (via email)

Ms. Teri Hedding, President, Illinois Registry of Interpreters
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