



"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 Monday, June 27, 2016

President
Corey Axelrod
president@iadeaf.org

Dear Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission Chairperson Theresa Fuller-Sakolsky and Fellow Commissioners:

Vice President
Kevin Ryan
vicepresident@iadeaf.org

On behalf of the Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD), I write this letter to you as a follow-up to my letter from last week to Director John Miller. This letter was in regards to the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission's (IDHHC) exclusion of the Illinois Association of the Deaf (IAD), Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association (ISDAA) and Jacksonville Community Center for the Deaf (JCCD) from the steering committee advising the IDHHC on strategic initiatives to ensure a comprehensive vision is set in place to secure candidates for the ISD Superintendent position.

Secretary
Shelley Williams
secretary@iadeaf.org

Treasurer
Lisa Roth
treasurer@iadeaf.org

The plethora of concerns I write to you about today go well beyond the concerns expressed in last week's letter to Director Miller.

Membership Secretary
Susan Dramin-Weiss
membership@iadeaf.org

After being elected President of the IAD, one of the first meetings I had was with Director Miller. This was a productive dinner meeting; one I hoped would assist in rebuilding the necessary relationship between the IAD and IDHHC. Since then, there has been continuous dialogue between the IDHHC and IAD, and Director Miller attended several recent IAD functions, including the IAD Community Roundtable and IAD's April Board Meeting.

During the IAD Community Roundtable, Director Miller shared with more than fifty attendees the details of the IDHHC's recent dialogue with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to make sign language interpreting services in educational settings more accessible. Despite the open lines of communication between both organizations, this information was never communicated to the IAD, let alone the general public, until Director Miller voluntarily shared this information during the roundtable meeting. During discussions with ISBE, the IDHHC did not discuss with or collaborate with the greater community, including the IAD and Illinois Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

Further, during the April IAD board meeting in Champaign, Director Miller shared the IDHHC supported HB 5033, a bill that was at the time before the Illinois General Assembly and sought to mandate each qualifying movie theatre operate with a certain number of closed captioning devices at any given time. Members of IAD were shocked the IDHHC did not seek out the community's input before providing their position, especially as this bill did not do anything to enhance the accessibility already in place for most theatres in Illinois.

As shared in my letter to Director Miller last week, representatives from the IDHHC have continuously expressed neutrality regarding conflicts and their stance on representing all deaf and hard of hearing community stakeholders. However, the IDHHC has failed on numerous accounts to engage the community, instead citing systematic constraints put forth by the Governor's Office and limited budget, staff and resources as the primary reasons for inability to communicate with the general public (e.g., produce ASL-based videos) and take a more proactive approach in ensuring needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals are met.

The latest in the long string of occurrences that necessitated an urgent response from the community was the IDHHC's decision to exclude the IAD, ISDAA and JCCD from the steering committee advising the IDHHC. As IDHHC is bound to the Open Meetings Act (OMA), any gathering to consider, conduct or discuss public business requires a quorum of a public body. During the May 12th and preceding commissioner meetings, the topics of ISD or its superintendent search were not discussed.

As IDHHC commissioners cannot participate in private discourse about the operations of IDHHC and there have been no meetings since May 12th, this likely suggests commissioners found out about the IDHHC's expanded responsibilities through the same June 2016 "Communication Matters" newsletter that the general public received.

All in all, the IDHHC's lack of transparency, communication and accountability continues to be of great concern to the IAD.

The IAD is well too aware of the failure of the IDHHC to abide by mandated constraints and lack of the commissioners' impartial regulation of the IDHHC. By not enforcing your powers and holding the director and his team accountable for the goals and objectives set forth by the commission, you leave deaf and hard of hearing citizens vulnerable to the unacceptable egregious behaviors at IDHHC.

At the same time, you shall also engage and listen to the concerns expressed by the very stakeholders you represent. Over the past weekend, several commissioners publicly dissented the IAD's position on social media. This immediately served as a perversion of what is supposed to be a transparent and impartial regulation of the IDHHC and placed a barrier between the commissioners and the very stakeholders you are supposed to represent.

In closing, Dalai Lama once said, "A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity." Along these lines, the IAD also strongly encourages the director and commissioners to have open dialogue with community members, a first of many steps to repair the IDHHC's image and strengthen its relationship with the greater community.

Sincerely,



Corey Axelrod
President
Illinois Association of the Deaf

cc: 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
Susan Dramin-Weiss, Membership Secretary, Illinois Association of the Deaf