

ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MINUTES

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)

I. Welcome & Opening Remarks

- Chris Pressnall introduced newly appointed chair, Victoria Young, brief introduction and opening remarks

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Ex-officio Members, State Agency Directors or Designees

- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Chris Pressnall) – Present
- Illinois Department of Human Services (David Esposito) – Present
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (Isabel Velez-Diaz) – Not Present
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (Jose Burgos) – Not Present
- Illinois Department of Public Health (Gerrin Cheek Butler) – Present
- Illinois Department of Transportation (Brandy Phillips) – Present (John Sherrill)

Elected Officials

- Representative Kimberly DuBuclet – State Representative 5th District – Present
- Senator Celina Villanueva – State Senator 12th District – Not Present

Governor Appointed Commissioners

- Marcella Keenan Corona – Present
- Pratigyan Bhusal – Present
- Commissioner Hampton – Not Present
- Donovan Griffin – Not Present
- Tonyisha Harris - Present
- Cheryl Johnson – Not Present
- Marcus Jordan – Present
- Commissioner Dulce Ortiz – Present
- Ashish Sharma – Present
- Stephen Sylvester – Present
- Victoria Young – Present

*Quorum (13 of 24) was met

III. Topics

Federal EJ Updates & Illinois EPA Updates (Tech issue fixed, video recording began)

- Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA) confirmed Illinois EPA's commitment to EJ program, continuing to expand public outreach and language access
- Commissioner Harris asked about closing of USEPA environmental justice office's impact on EJ Commission's and EJ work in general

- Commissioner Pressnall indicated that Illinois EPA's EJ program has evolved due to civil rights complaints filed against the agency. Illinois EPA will continue to honor commitments in agreements resolving the complaints.
 - Commissioner Pressnall said that the money directed to organizations working on EJ issues will feel the effects since many grant programs were in jeopardy.
- Marissa Wesley (IERG) asked if Illinois EPA receives funding from USEPA or any other federal channels, and if so, if that federal funding is lost, what are the effects on the agency and if Illinois EPA will look for additional funding sources.
 - Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA)
 - IEPA does receive some funding from the federal government, but the IEPA receives no Illinois general revenue funding.
 - The Agency is self-funded, generated in part, through permit fees.
 - The Illinois EPA Office of Environmental Justice does not receive federal funding.
 - Not in a position to address additional funding sources beyond any currently pending legislation.
- Commissioner Corona – commented on Chris's mention of disruption felt by locally funded organizations and whether Illinois EPA could assist.
 - Commissioner Pressnall
 - The Agency is open to exploring options but would need legislation and appropriations
 - The Inflation Reduction Act was unprecedented, and Illinois EPA does not have resources to replace that on the same level.
- Chair Young – built upon previous statements to reiterate the importance of identifying EJ commission objectives. Also mentioned conversations regarding Illinois EPA supporting programs and initiatives using research and data.
- Delia Barajas – Asked a general question regarding a local bill to create a second wastewater facility in an EJ community, specifically in Stickney, Illinois. Replied that folks on the ground are confused about what a second facility would mean. Asked if anyone on the call has knowledge of additional wastewater facilities added within an EJ community.
 - Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA) – Replied he was not aware of this facility and that other local, state, and federal regulators may need to approve before Illinois EPA receives a permit application.
 - Commissioner Sylvester (IAGO) – Clarified that under the Environmental Protection Act wastewater treatment facilities are considered pollution control facilities and they require a local siting process before a permit is reviewed at the IEPA, which means there is an opportunity for public awareness and involvement under section 39.2 of the Environmental Protection Act. Although he also reiterated that he did not have an answer to Delia's specific question regarding two facilities in the same EJ area.
- Delia Barajas included information regarding the bill she referred to into the chat.

- Chair Young reiterated that she wanted the Commission to stay abreast of issues in EJ communities that would allow the Commission to make recommendations.

2025 Trainings & Housekeeping

- Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA) – Appointees are made aware of trainings that must be completed upon appointment by the Governor’s Office. This does not include those who work for state agencies, as state employees already take these trainings. Governor appointees however will need to take various mandated trainings and IEPA OEJ will follow-up on those requirements
- Chair Young raised the Open Meetings Act designee for the Commission. Asked if anyone is interested in volunteering, if not, she stated she wanted the Commission to consider Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA) as the OMA designee. Chair Young moved to vote.
 - Commissioner Corona motioned to recommend Chris
 - Commissioner Sylvester (IAGO) seconded the motion
 - Chair Young asked for “ayes” and “nays”
 - All voters unanimously voted “aye” for Commissioner Pressnall (IEPA) as the OMA designee.

2025 Workplan, Priorities, and Bylaws

- Chair Young led a discussion regarding the value of creating subcommittees.
 - Generally focus will be on air, water, and land.
 - Subcommittees will help support the work of the Commission and add to valuable information for the yearly report to be submitted to the Governor’s Office and General Assembly by October 1st.
 - Subcommittees must be less than 7 people, and if not, then they must comply with the Open Meetings Act.
 - The idea is to have subcommittees meet in between the quarterly meetings of the full Commission to share thoughts, findings, and recommendations.
 - Commissioner Sylvester – The Commission should seek opportunities to provide public comments to the pollution control board rulemaking processes (e.g., coal combustion surface impoundments and EJ factors)
 - Chair Young – this is a great example of what would be good for the Commission to propose, support, or give better recommendations and address concerns regarding EJ. Although this would be up to the subcommittees to decide what they would focus on.
 - Subcommittee focused on EJ screening tools
 - Chair Young – Urged Commissioners to keep in mind that there are individuals who may have knowledge about tools and resources that would be helpful, and to avoid reinventing the wheel.

- IEPA used two screening tools, its own EJ Start tool as well as EJScreen because it had more demographic and socioeconomic indicators. Because so many tools have been pulled, state agencies are now exploring new tools for screening, including developing EJStart further, to include more data and information.
- Commission Harris suggested a subcommittee focused on engagement youth policy-oriented groups.
 - Chair Young – Agreed this was an issue to look at.
- Commissioners suggested a subcommittee focused on creating definition of environmental justice and cumulative impacts (in addition to EJ screening tools)
- Commissioner Sharma – what will be the task of the subcommittee focused on EJ tools.
 - Chair Young – clarified that those decisions would be up to the subcommittees to decide and determine the purpose for the use of EJ tools as well as recommendations for agencies.
- Commissioner Sharma – follow-up regarding status of questionnaire sent out to State agencies.
 - Chair Young – Tabled due to not yet receiving responses from all agencies. Two agencies have submitted answers.
- Subcommittee focused on analyzing the questionnaire to gather responses from State agencies.
 - Answer, Victoria – that be something the subcommittees would have to navigate and decide.
- Chair Young put the formation of subcommittees to a vote.
 - All voted “aye” with no “nay” votes.
 - Chair Young stated that subcommittees will be formed and that a survey will be created for Commissioners to indicate interests, topics, and determine subcommittees chairs and co-chairs.
- Draft bylaws to be circulated among Commissioners ahead of the June quarterly meeting.

Open Discussion & Questions

- Commissioner Sylvester commended the work of the IAGO, IEPA, and community-based partners regarding the blocking of a toxic dredged waste landfill in the southeast side of Chicago.
- Commissioner Corona commented about an ordinance being proposed in Chicago that would focus on land use laws that are protective of overburdened EJ communities.
- Commissioner Bhusal commented that a sub-subcommittee could be formed of a technical nature, or for research purposes, to update the commission with real time data every time we meet.

- Chair Young supported this idea and emphasized the importance of Southern Illinois being represented on the Commission in terms of reach and participation.
- Katia Balba commented on topics already mentioned, blocking of landfill, as well as the ordinance mentioned by Commissioner Corona. Also mentioned the development of IQMP Illinois Quantum & Microelectronics Park and this body may be able to focus on questions regarding land, air, and water use.
- Chair Young urged the Commission to keep in mind that the governor is forward-thinking on topics of economic development. Emphasized that money and policy go hand-in-hand, and the Commission should look out for earmarked dollars for programs and initiatives.

IV. Adjournment

- Victoria thanked all those present at the commission meeting today.