

Illinois Commission on Environmental Justice, March 29, 2023, Meeting Notes

Welcome – Chris Pressnall

- Chair Wasserman will not be available today. Chris will be leading on her behalf.
- Commissioners, please introduce yourselves in Chat to have a record.
 - Commissioners
 - Gerrin Cheek Butler Illinois Department of Public Health
 - Chris Pressnall, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
 - Victoria Wilson, NUE, Inc
 - Todd Fuller, Illinois Department of Human Services - Housing
 - Jose M. Burgos – Illinois Department of Natural Resources
 - Donovan Griffith Illinois Manufacturing Association
 - Dulce Ortiz Co-Chair Clean Power Lake County
 - Attendees
 - Kelly Thompson, Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group
 - Debbie Williams, City of Springfield, Office of Public Utilities
 - Donald Wink UIC Also associated with PERRO
 - Maite Olivera, Clean Power Lake County
 - Anacua Orellana Garcia- Climate Justice Alliance
 - Stephen Sylvester, Illinois Attorney General's Office
 - James Mensah, Illinois EPA, Office of EJ
 - Luis Lopez, Illinois EPA, Office of EJ
 - Alane Herr, Illinois EPA, Associate Director's Office
 - Sabrina Bailey, Illinois EPA, Office of Community Relations

Chris – previewing agenda:

- First presentation - Agenda
 - Illinois Environmental Justice Act revision
 - Created this Commission
 - 14 total governor appointees (ways to recruit and get people to apply)
 - Law was recently changed. New appointees for 4 years.
 - Appointments used to be 1 or 2 years, difficult to keep up with.
 - Any thoughts about new appointees?
 - Dulce Ortiz- how many vacancies how to apply? 14 governor appointees
 - Chris responds, go to boards and commissions website to nominate self. Will send out link to Illinois boards and commissions site and how to apply.
 - Victoria Wilson question – more information regarding responsibility of commission and how to move things forward in this role.

- Chris responds – getting enough people in the commission – EJ commission more successful in the past when full member list, can form subcommittees to tackle specific issues: like agency integration of environmental justice; aspirations for commission, pain points for commissioners in EJ communities to determine what commissioners want to work on to fulfill statutory mandate to advise on matters concerning EJ: opportunities include funding, and policy development. But involvement from people in the commission and direction from people themselves to get together, meeting more than once a quarter to generate a work product. This is how it's been successful in the past.
 - Donovan Griffith – Justice 40 oversight committee, going to do similar things as this, going to struggle with staffing that as well?
 - Chris: not involved with Justice 40 committee professional or personally, valid concerns, same pool of folks will be looked at serving on the Justice 40 oversight committee.
 - Victoria Wilson: wants DG to share bill
 - Donovan – House Bill 2487 and stated he would be leaving this meeting

- Legislation
 - Chris – number of proposals being monitored: EJ legislation, seems like it may not pass this session; Large permit fees; ambitious bill with a lot of requirements. Does anyone have thoughts or insight about EJ legislation
 - Donovan Griffith – (still here) main EJ bill house bill 2520 only got 50 votes need 60 to pass. IMA (Illinois Manufacturers' Association) opposed to the bill. Working with Illinois Environmental Council to make changes to it. They may try to pass it through the house next after two-week break on April 17th. There are going to be conversations and discussions between industry groups and environmental/environmental justice groups like the Illinois Environmental Council.
 - Victoria – question: who is leading, which reps are leading.
 - DG – Sonia Harper in the house, Senator Villanueva.
 - Victoria – asking to get clarity about how to understand how input can be submitted in a timely fashion for consideration, and who is leading/chairing and whether bills were being approved or denied. And how they define roles on Justice 40 vs those with EJ commission.

- Aspirations for EJ Commission
 - Chris – Donovan had helpful perspective from industry. We can move to aspirations for EJ Commission.
 - What are the aspirations for the commission?
 - Chris- my aspirations are
 - Getting more commissioners
 - Getting people engaged
 - Getting a work product

- How to seize this time when EJ is has time in the sun. What should we be working on?
 - Dulce – grants through the federal government. Some EJ communities are not informed. How do we ensure that we put forth that information out. Some EJ communities are not informed about the work we do and grants available to them. I serve on Hydrogen economy taskforce. Energy dollars being directed to clean energy projects or new technology: how do these projects impact environmental justice communities? Specifically for example, a Hydrogen bill in legislature. When people use EJ as a term, it is used loosely. How do we put our presence out there so people understand these terms more specifically. For example, when industry gets billions of dollars in funding for projects without being intentional about the impact is has on EJ communities. These are my priorities. How are terms used and defined. Also, how can we do a better job about educating and informing communities impacted by these issues.
 - Chris – Should we share different strategies? Have you thought about this, Dulce?
 - Dulce – the first step is to share and pick two or three priorities for the year – but understanding that it’s difficult without consistency in meeting. As a commission, we could all share and pick priorities for this year. And once we have appointments we need, both priorities and consistency in meetings to get work done.
 - Todd Fuller – comment unsure if there is any comprehensive study that points to this or one could be commissioned to give us a starting point to focus on and pull priorities from.
 - Chris – asked for more clarity on Todd’s thinking in regard to this comment.
 - Todd – in role in human services and housing sometimes that we look to institutions of higher education to give us a base/inform us of what are the most pressing issues. What can be done or what has been done already that we could begin building off.
 - Chris – speaking from impression as long-time government employee working on EJ issues. There are big issues, systemic issues, but EJ becomes a grass roots issues, getting information out to people for grants, etc., but the challenge is getting into every community and group and talking about EJ issues when there are other things people in overburdened communities may be experiencing simultaneously.
 - Sabrina Bailey – Going off what Todd said, maybe a place to start thinking about would be a questionnaire to see where their interests lie within their community and group people based on similar interests. We only meet quarterly and may need to meet more often, so people with similar interests can meet and develop ideas to determine what to work on and collaborating.
 - Chris – yes and we also go back to can we get numbers and people.
- Pain points?
 - Victoria Wilson – variety of issues in variety of areas in Illinois, suggestion of “hub spots” to give the tools and resources to communities. Create workshops to help communities understand tools and resources. One of the biggest challenges is being informed. Also, hub spots may help to collect data for concerns. There is not enough data to support the argument. We have talked about workshops in different counties and municipalities to share and get feedback and engagement. In the next 2-4 years, we need that

commitment to have a strong recommendation. But we need to get our items out to the general public.

- Chris- Chair Wasserman also spoke about this. Getting out into the communities around the state to figure out what the issues are. Is it an aspiration for 2023 or 2024? Different approaches in different communities throughout the state. How can we learn from those communities to move forward. We should weave these into our aspirations. Any other thoughts or aspirations for EJ Commission?
- Chris – there are a lot of funds from USEPA from the Inflation Reduction Act. Does anyone want to share if they are working on Grant Applications? Recent experience in East St. Louis. A lot of grant opportunities seem like they are earmarked for groups that have not gotten grants from the USEPA. Groups that don't have resources/experience with grant applications.
- Victoria – as a business owner and entrepreneur I understand challenges in the 501(c)(3) space, often these organizations don't have the resources or administrative backing or holding capacity and they work with a fiscal sponsor who charges them for holding funds above \$250,000. People need to know how to work through federal application process. And they need administrative support to get money moved through the communities. Getting people in our commission is hard enough. The only way we can do this is by becoming involved, asking people about how we can be of service to them so appointed or elected officials can be held to the ground. Constituents don't always understand the roles and responsibilities of their elected. But if we can listen, participate, bring it back for assessment, put a proposal together and put in a funnel that allows access to resources and engage with people in different tiers to see proactive actions. There is a communication problem.
- Chris – I like the idea of hubs, us being a hub. It could be an aspiration. How can the IEPA/Commissioners make themselves be a hub for different grant opportunities? Victoria suggested we could talk about the commissioners' pain points. Pain may lead us to aspirations
- Victoria – I want to hear about pains of people on this call and not overwhelm the conversation.
- Gregory Norris – A lot of what we have said is not unknown but going unanswered. In relation to hubs, I think there was a grant for thriving communities to establish hubs that went from 5 million to 10 million for a couple of years. If we could become a connection that would be focused on Illinois, it might be great. There is no network of any sort and no booklet from any state that combines all these conversations or promotions that support the talk that goes on in communities. 85% of the nation does not know what's going on, translate that to black/brown communities that 99+%.
- Chris – I like the idea of thriving communities' grants, creation of hubs, and seeing how our commission could be tied in with that. I want to think there is a momentum with EJ. How do we catch that wave to serve and improve communities.
- Gregory Norris – a resounding message needs to be developed
- Victoria Wilson – putting together a campaign, a campaign focused initiative. Branding is important. Making things sound sharp and catchy. How can we sandwich tools and

resources, package them and share them so there aren't a plethora of scattered sites and links.

- Gregory Norris – yes, a booklet or some type of marketing scheme to tell what the whole intent of this is.
- Chris – other thoughts or pain points to share? This has been great. It is encouraging that we have common themes that keep coming up. This discussion reminds me of call with USEPA and a rep of the state asked for a 1–2-page summation of grants and money coming out. Answer from USEPA was no. They don't have a list of what is available.
- Victoria Wilson – internal audit falls back on agencies and is challenging. No single streamlined line of communication to how to accomplish goals.
- Chris – Pain points goes to open discussion and questions
- OPEN DISCUSSION QUESTIONS? While we think of those we can talk about next meeting.
- Next meeting dates: Possibly June maybe May?
 - Chris – Wednesdays at 1pm in May? June?
 - Victoria – prefer if we don't delay too far out May would be ideal, but maybe some input from commissioners regarding pain points to discuss proactive actions in the next meeting?
 - Perhaps a survey for overall engagement?
 - Share the appointments for EJ commission
 - Chris – Dates?
 - Victoria – end of the month may be too hectic?
 - Chris – May be easier to pick a date now? May 17th 24th or June 17th
 - Kelly Thompson – Last week of session is 15-19th may not be the best week to meet.
 - Chris - 24th or 7th?
 - Gerrin – I am not available on the 24th but the 7th is fine.
 - Chris – June 7th 1pm to 3pm. Will work on a survey: summarizing thoughts. Info on how to nominate yourself for this commission. Is there anything else before we end?
 - Victoria – where are the allies in the environmental fight? Where are the supporters in Springfield? How do we engage? Getting seasoned persons who have been active in these places. Maybe if approved, I can create a landing page to highlight what we do, regarding the impact of EJ throughout the state to build hope and momentum. Branding speaks for everything. Faces of people representing the state in this fight supporting those communities. Supporting them when they need a few more votes, etc. And for younger people who want to know about career opportunities in this space.
 - Chris – Thank you. Hopefully we have gained some momentum and hopefully we will have more next time, Wednesday, June 7th at 1pm.

Meeting ended at 2:26pm