

COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
MEETING NOTES  
NO QUORUM  
Tuesday, July 13, 2022 (1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. CT)

**I. Welcome**

**A. Kimberly Wasserman – Chair**

**II. Introductions**

**A. Teleconference**

- i. Kim Wasserman – Executive Director at Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)
- ii. Chris Pressnall – Illinois EPA Environmental Justice Coordinator,
- iii. Keith Harley – Attorney at Greater Chicago Legal Clinic
- iv. Veronica Kyle – Co-founder of EcoWomanist Institute
- v. Brad Frost- Manager of Community Relations at the Illinois EPA
- vi. Rudy Alanis – Illinois EPA Office of Community Relations, Spanish Translator for the Agency
- vii. Sabrina Bailey – Illinois EPA Office of Community Relations
- viii. Andrew Armstrong – Chief of the Attorney General Springfield Environmental Bureau
- ix. Tonyisha Harris- Action for the Climate Emergency
- x. Alec Davis- Executive Director at the Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group
- xi. Donovan Griffith- Senior Director of Governmental Affairs, Illinois Manufacturing Association
- xii. Kristin DiCenso – Chief of Staff Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- xiii. Ashish Sharma – UIUC, Illinois State Water Survey
- xiv. Todd Fuller – Statewide Housing Coordinator with the Illinois Department of Human Services
- xv. Victoria Wilson – President/CEO Naturally Urban Environments Incorporated
- xvi. Paulina Lopez-Santos – Project Associate at Environmental Council of the States (ECOS)
- xvii. Stephanie Bilenko- Nuclear Energy Information Service
- xviii. Ryan Hidden- Beyond Coal organizer for Illinois, Sierra Club
- xix. Cheryl Johnson – Executive Director for People for Community Recovery
- xx. Alane Herr – Office Coordinator for Associate Director’s Office, Illinois EPA
- xxi. Anthony Tindall – Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability
- xxii. Celina Villanueva – State Senator of the 11<sup>th</sup> district
- xxiii. Delia Barajas – Sisterhood Community Farm
- xxiv. Donald Wink – Professor, UIUC
- xxv. Brad Simms- Exxon Mobil

**III. Approval of Agenda**

- A. Skipped because quorum was not reached.**

#### IV. Presentations/Discussions:

##### A. Appointments/Reappointments

- i. Chris begins by addressing those whose appointments have lapsed.
  1. Push to get fresh appointments for those who are still interested in serving.
  2. Three newly appointed members are lapsing soon and were not able to fully serve because of COVID-19.
  3. Those that are interested in being reappointed, go to Illinois Boards and Commissions website, and nominate yourself for the Commission.
    - a. Let Kim and/or Chris know you've applied.
- ii. Vacancies need to be filled
  1. Having a full Commission with current appointments is the goal.
  2. Recruiting/brainstorming ideas for new members encouraged.

##### B. Comments on Appointments/Reappointments

- i. **Chair Wasserman:** Difficulties have been filling seats and appointments of seats, helpful to let her or Chris know whether people have applied or not so they know if it's a question of the governor's office taking a long time or people not applying in general.
- ii. **Victoria Wilson:** What three positions need filled for the Commission?
  1. **Chair Wasserman:** Two labor organizations, one expert on environmental health, and one expert on environmental justice
- iii. **Tonyisha Harris:** Can we get an overview of what the EJ Commission does for those of us that are newly appointed?
  1. **Chris Pressnall:** Statutorily, the commission is to advise the governor's office around EJ issues. The way that the statute is set up is that there are quarterly meetings (4x a year) talking about issues around EJ for EJ communities and then making recommendations to governor's office on whatever may have been discussed/voted on.
    - a. In the past: One major accomplishment was forming subcommittees and advising Illinois Solar for All how to define EJ
- iv. **Chris Pressnall:** There is a ton going on with EJ at the federal and state level, trying to enhance IEPA program and do a better job with language access and public participation. Can be enhanced with stakeholder participation for example those on the call/ EJ Commission.
  1. What do the commissioners want to work on, study, weigh in on? It is a collaborative effort.
- v. **Juliana Pino:** Looking to statute for EJ Commission duties: Commission can advise all state entities, implies the intersection of advising different agencies on environmental justice implications
  1. EJ commission is tasked with reviewing and analyzing the impact of current state laws/policies on issues of EJ and sustainable communities

- a. Statute has pieces on developing criteria to assess whether communities in the state may be experiencing EJ issues- this gets to the Commission's role in defining and identifying EJ communities
  - b. Commission can recommend things to Governor's office, including prioritizing areas of the state that need immediate attention
- vi. **Chair Wasserman:** Wanted to talk about appointments early because there is a lot happening on the state/federal level with EJ that Commission can weigh in on. Part of the issue is being able to have quorum to be able to make decisions. Goal is to establish bylaws as a Commission.
  - 1. Link to appointment information:  
<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/bac/SitePages/AppointmentsDetail.aspx?BCID=802>

#### C. Open Meetings Act training

- i. **Chris Pressnall:** Will send follow-up email to commissioners with link to attorney general's office Open Meetings Act training materials
  - 1. Can reach out directly to Chris with questions

#### D. EJ Commission bylaws

- i. **Chris Pressnall:** There were an outgrowth of conversations that were had before extended break- all of those serving had no relationship to bylaws such that there aren't any in existence. Hoping to have a full reboot of the EJ commission meaning getting new appointments and organize/structure how we do business from there. Does anyone have examples on how other commissions operate?
  - 1. Sketching out bylaws and getting on the website so that everyone is on the same understanding, reaching quorum
- ii. **Chair Wasserman:** Chris is going to reach out to different committees and staffing to see what resources they have and what guidance they can provide us. Calling on everyone to provide examples to determine what the right mechanisms are for the EJ Commission to run under
- iii. **Victoria Wilson:** It's good to have bylaws and structure but need to simplify them as best as possible so we don't get caught up in creating them and won't get anything else accomplished
  - 1. Will share structural information from the Cook County Environmental Sustainability Committee
- iv. **Cheryl Johnson:** What about the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council's bylaws as a guide?
  - 1. **Chair Wasserman:** We will look at NEJAC bylaws

#### E. Illinois EPA EJ program updates

- i. **Chris Pressnall:** IEPA looking to make procedural and substantive improvements on EJ

1. Public Participation Policy (PPP) out there based on an old policy, have updated but looking to improve it still and the Commission can play a part in this
  - a. Working on Language Access Plan and Disability Plan
  - b. We use the term “areas of EJ concern” and use our EJ Start GIS mapping tool, looking to update it such as add more indicators from USEPA EJ Screen
- ii. **Donovan Griffith:** Would the commission be a part of EJ mapping tool updating?
  1. **Chris Pressnall:** If EJ bill all the sudden passes then things will change, but thinking about developing it internally at the moment and Commission will have a role in reviewing it
- iii. **Victoria Wilson:** Wants to make sure each agency represented can have transparency between EJ communities and constituents and support the Governor in his decisions to get these issues resolved. How do we make the best use of restructuring while still dealing with the urgent issues (such as climate change, human services, corporate accountability)? Wants to be transparent with the community and those who share concerns/ask questions. What are we really trying to get accomplished?
  1. **Chris Pressnall:** Agencies represented by statute in Commission: IDPH, IDNR, IDHS/Housing, IDOT
    - a. How do things channel up through the EJ Commission? With other state agencies it’s on us to make sure we work with state agencies and maybe we can help make connections and build capacity
    - b. **Victoria Wilson:** Want to make sure resources get to communities that need them. There are plenty of funds flowing through Illinois but gaps in communication and transparency, so we want to be the solution to that problem
  2. **Ashish Sharma:** State Water Survey can provide expertise and data and anything related to climate change so that can be related when we talk about EJ issues
- iv. **Keith Harley:** Conversation has happened around legislation that included many of the Commissioners here today and came to a conclusion about what EJ legislation should look like as far as defining EJ communities. There is conversation about pending Title VI Civil Rights complaints between USEPA and Illinois EPA. All of these conversations involve Illinois EPA- are those involved talking to each other because it sounds like there are different approaches on rebooting this fundamental thing
  1. **Chris Pressnall:** Yes- trying to work with IT and get ahead of the game to see what it may look like and get the infrastructure in place, then whatever tweaks need to be made can be made. It’s about getting data and how you manipulate it

- v. **Veronica Kyle:** Continuing with Commission has more to do with where I feel the state is right now since Covid around the issue of mental/physical health in EJ communities. Many communities weren't healthy before pandemic and people are even less healthy now, seems to be a glaring issue and the city gets distracted with crime, but mental health is a concern and would like to direct people to services. Don't lose the human element in the midst of other things we advocate for in the Commission
  - 1. High level of evictions from rent is an issue, there is a lot more homelessness with women/children- this is an EJ issue. Chicago has highest level of evictions in the nation
- vi. **Delia Barajas:** Biggest issue as a grassroots low-income community of color with EJ is that the burden of proof and responsibility is on us, which is extremely difficult. An example is working with the permits in Cicero. EJ Screen is complex and difficult to teach communities, such as what the census block is and what industries can be found in front of schools/what schools are built on brownfields/superfunds. People need to know all this information and burden of proof falls on communities
  - 1. Constantly asking IEPA about permits and doing all the research. Unless we're driving around to figure things out, we don't know.
  - 2. Need to do the EJ mapping with simple things to show her community, there has to be an easier solution for proving that these industries are in violation
- vii. **Juliana Pino:** Wanted to express support to the last couple of comments- these issues are compounding the exposure reality in communities, one of the reasons why California mapping/Power Agency's map process includes social vulnerabilities in its criteria. Critical that we don't use sight of that because there's never the ability to engage one issue at a time. Community organizers have to think about it holistically and need mapping tools that communicate that. Need one place for all critical information. Suggestion for a mapping tool along with different kinds of resources such as audio/visual that are easier to understand for communities or hotline for people to ask questions about mapping tools and information. Certain frontline communities don't have access to these same types of local organizations, there aren't resources that serve the communities directly. Everything has been derived from permitting and regulation, agencies should also engage with impacted constituents.
- viii. **Alec Davis:** Wanted to see if Chris or anyone had thoughts about the role of this commission in discussing what comes out of a grievance settlement, how it may impact state agency activities and EJ activities
  - 1. **Chris Pressnall:** Unsure because the settlements are between IEPA and USEPA and don't see a place for outside involvement in that. Not directly involved in legislation discussion, do think commission as these things are tweaked could play a role in advising or providing input on how all these things come crashing down together. See the

need right now to continue to move things forward like mapping and policy matters. Commission can provide input after settlements are finalized (instruct agency to do “x” but how do we do “x”)

2. **Alec Davis:** Are we looking at resolving a disparate or discreet instance or is something being alleged that the agency’s going to make right? Or is it fundamental programmatic level change that’s being discussed that will impact tons of people across the state that will want to know how they may be affected?
  - a. **Chris Pressnall:** USEPA Office of External Civil Rights Compliance has telegraphed pretty clear that they’re looking to enhance sit specific substantive measure and procedural safeguards (language access, disability access). USEPA going to look to apply Civil Rights concepts into the environmental concepts with decision making.
  - b. **Keith Harley:** We represent the complainants in the Title VI complaint with General Iron (Southeast Environmental Task Force, People for Community Recovery), and we are not a part of those conversations. We have no role in negotiations because they are being conducted as a review of Title VI compliance by a federal agency and its state-funded partner. Excluding everyone as they’re trying to figure out what Title VI compliance looks like. Allegations are not only about General Iron facility but programmatic elements (how IEPA runs EJ in the scope of permitting requirements).
  - c. **Victoria Wilson:** Understand the importance of transparency to EJ Commission but focusing on technicalities will result in us going down the rabbit hole, and is that the best use of our time? Or are we going to focus on identifying solutions that will be able to support. One of my core focuses is how do we work from the bottom up regarding community engagement. Not a one size fits all, have to treat each instance/case study specifically. How do we get the community to be able to articulate EJ issues and get that to the point where it gets to the state agencies that will be able to support them and funnel the communication back?

#### **F. Chicago Cumulative Impact Analysis Project**

- i. **Chair Wasserman:** This project will try to highlight communities that are overburdened and have way too much going on. Focuses on how to be more thoughtful when planning, siting, and permitting in these areas. This came from EJ organizations in Chicago wanting to fight industry and figure out what we could be doing different in our neighborhood.
  1. Worked and did analysis with partners and other states to see what other communities were doing. Worked with Chief Sustainability Officer at City of Chicago, USEPA, and other allies

2. Helping put together what a cumulative impact ordinance would look like. Determining what the different data sets are, what story do they tell, is the data accurate (working with communities)
  3. **Chris Pressnall:** IEPA will have a seat at the table, very exciting and ambitious project. Will look at the whole city of Chicago and do a cumulative impact analysis to see where there are overburdened communities. This helps inform various aspects of environmental regulation. IEPA doesn't regulate location of facilities, this project can inform City of Chicago land use decisions
- ii. **Juliana Pino:** This process is extremely important but not unprecedented, other municipalities have pursued creating local laws that are both comprehensive in nature and also create procedures and intersections with local permitting and other governance
1. Where do local entities get involved? There is a pattern of important policies that are being developed and lessons for state agencies from local jurisdictions, where does the authority of the state agency come in and impact the process, how do communities get involved and exercise their perspective

#### V. Open Discussion/Questions

- i. **Juliana Pino:** Want to clarify the process for getting items on the agenda for future meetings as well as identifying any agenda items that members may want to put on future meetings
  1. **Chair Wasserman:** Can email Chris or myself
  2. **Victoria Wilson:** Would it be possible to do monthly meetings in the future?
  3. **Chair Wasserman:** One thing we want to do next meeting is set up a schedule for meetings next year
  4. **Chris Pressnall:** Start by scheduling quarterly and then we can split up into subcommittees

#### VI. Next Meeting Date and Location

- i. October 11, 2022 at 1 p.m. CT via Citrix Webex
  1. Any additional information/questions such as suggestions for bylaws and agenda items can be emailed to Chris or Kim.