



APPROVED APR 7 0 2026

Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

Nina Harris, Chairperson
Alexandria Wilson, Executive Director
115 S LaSalle Street, Suite 4N
Chicago, IL 60603

NOTICE

Business Enterprise Council for Minorities, Females and Persons with Disabilities

CERTIFICATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

1:30 pm – 3:30 pm

**Location: Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion 115 S. LaSalle Street, 4th Floor – Lincoln Park
Conference Room, Chicago, IL 60603**

**Lincoln Tower Plaza 524 South 2nd Street, Suite 502 - CEI Executive Conference Room, Springfield, IL
62701.**

Virtual: Webex Meeting

MINUTES

I. Call Meeting to Order

- Acting Chair Alexandria Wilson called the meeting to order serving in place of Chair Alan Brazil at 1:32 p.m.
- In accordance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/1 et seq., the Commission provided telephonic and video access to the meeting so that members of the public can monitor the meeting and has updated its website to keep the public fully apprised of the Commission activities relating to virtual participation.
- **Roll Call of Subcommittee Members**
 - Acting Chair Wilson conducted roll call of members. A quorum was not present at that time.

BEP Council				
ATTENDANCE ROSTER: COUNCIL MEMBERS				
Members	Present			Absent
	In person Chicago	In person Springfield	via WebEx	
Alan Brazil				X
Bola Delano	X			
Andrew Johnson	X			
Jesse Martinez	X			
Arielle Johnson	X			
Olivier Kamanzi	X			
Gabriela Garza				X
Debra Jennings Johnson				X



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Agency Representatives

BEP Council				
ATTENDANCE ROSTER: Agency Representatives				
Agency	Representative	Present		
		In person - Chicago	In person - Springfield	via WebEx
Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion	LaTasha Binder	X		
	Hilaree Butler			X
	Carlos Gutierrez	X		
	Andres Padua			X
	Angela Phillips	X		
	Alexandria Wilson			X

II. Approval of Minutes: November 12, 2025 (Action)

- Member Olivier Kamanzi motioned to approve minutes from November 12, 2025. Seconded by Member Andrew Johnson. Motion approved by unanimous vote.

III. Ongoing Business

A. BEP Certification Unit Report – LaTasha Binder, CEI Deputy Director

- i. Deputy Director Binder presented the committee with the latest developments Operational Improvements.
 - a) The Certification Unit is actively participating in the Certify & Thrive campaign aimed at increasing BEP certification participation. The unit continues to collaborate with Outreach to leverage vendor and stakeholder networks, reinforce instructions for firms to update their information, and improve public understanding of the certification process. Certification Manager Carlos Gutierrez recently conducted training on Understanding BEP Certification and Denial Letters, with two sessions held on January 7 and January 9, 2026. Certification continues to provide weekly virtual office hours in English and Spanish and is strengthening relationships with partner agencies to remain current on changes across programs.
 - b) Certification Metrics (as of January 9, 2026):
 Total active certified vendors: 2,820
 - 862 African American owned
 - 16 American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 407 Asian American
 - 1,004 Caucasian American
 - 522 Hispanic American
 - 9 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

In accordance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120) and the Freedom of Information Act (5 ILCS 140) the above meeting is open to the public.

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IV. New Business**A. Stenstrom Petroleum Services Inc. – Certification Appeal (Action)****i. Fact Overview – CEI Certification Unit**

- a. Carlos Gutierrez presented the fact overview and stated the BEP Act sets an annual gross sales threshold of \$150 million. The applicant's 2024 federal tax return reflected gross sales exceeding that threshold, forming the basis for denial.

ii. Vendor Testimonial

- a. Initially, no representative was present. The Subcommittee later returned to this item when a representative joined by phone. The representative stated: The tax return referenced was a combined return of multiple entities, and that Stenstrom Petroleum Services Group alone was under the threshold (stated as approximately **\$41 million**). The appeal involved a renewal, and the firm had previously been granted certification. The firm was certified through WBENC and believed the renewal qualified as a fast-track process.

iii. Subcommittee Discussion

- a. Staff and Members clarified: The State considers affiliate ownership and affiliation when reviewing gross sales and eligibility. WBENC operates under different guidelines and does not use the State's gross sales threshold; Illinois applies statutory requirements including gross sales caps and affiliate review.

iv. Subcommittee Vote

- a. Member Andrew Johnson motioned to uphold the denial. Seconded by Member Olivier Kamanzi. Motion passed by unanimous vote.
- b. Certification denial upheld.

B. Valdes Engineering Company – Certification Appeal (Action)**i. Fact Overview – CEI Certification Unit**

- a. Carlos Gutierrez stated the denial was based on control requirements. He cited company bylaws describing governance by a board of directors and quorum requirements, and asserted this structure did not demonstrate unilateral control under BEP standards.

ii. Vendor Testimonial

- a. Robert Valdez, President of Valdes Engineering Company, testified that: He founded the company in 1992 and has led it continuously. 100% of shares are owned by the Robert C. Valdez Trust and he is the sole trustee with exclusive voting and management rights. The firm elected closed corporation status, shifting management authority to shareholders. A licensed architect was placed on the board solely to comply with Illinois professional licensing requirements, not to transfer ownership or control. He maintains ultimate authority over contracts,

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finances, hiring, banking, and operations. He requested reversal of the denial and approval of certification.

iii. Subcommittee Discussion

- a. Members discussed the distinction between ownership, governance, and day-to-day operations. Concerns that bylaw language about board management was unclear and potentially conflicting. The practical impact of licensing requirements on architectural/engineering firms and whether those requirements should be treated as loss of control. Several members indicated comfort with the explanation that board participation was limited for licensing compliance and not ownership/control.

iv. Subcommittee Vote

- a. Member Jessie Martinez motioned to overturn the denial and approve certification. Seconded by Member Arielle Johnson. Vote resulted in a tie, with two nays from Member Andrew Johnson and Member Olivier Kamanzi. Acting Chair Wilson stated that as Acting Chair in alignment with bylaws, she would cast the deciding vote and did so in favor of Valdes Engineering Company.
- b. Denial overturned; certification approved.

C. Apex Electrical Solutions Inc. – Certification Appeal (Action)**i. Fact Overview – CEI Certification Unit**

- a. Carlos Gutierrez stated the denial was based on governance and control concerns, including shareholder quorum provisions requiring participation from non-eligible shareholders, bank signature authority granted to a non-eligible individual, and documentation raising concerns related to control and capital contribution under BEP requirements.

ii. Vendor Testimonial

- a. Staci Frantz, Owner of Apex Electrical Solutions Inc., testified that the decision to add her brother-in-law, Brad France, as a bank account signer was made to ensure business continuity in the event of her unavailability, particularly for payroll and vendor payments. Ms. Frantz stated that the lending institution required her husband's name to appear on one of the loans for lender assurance. Although her résumé reflects a background in veterinary services, Ms. Frantz stated that she possesses relevant experience and operational knowledge from prior work in electrical contracting environments and management roles.
- b. Ms. Frantz further stated that she amended the company's bylaws and submitted the updated documentation to the Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion (CEI). She also informed the Subcommittee that she received a certification letter dated November 21, 2025 (received December 3, 2025) that reflected certification and expiration dates that had already passed, and that she later received a denial letter after inquiring about the discrepancy.

iii. Subcommittee Discussion

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- a. Subcommittee members inquired whether bank access changed following the denial and what authority the additional signer retained. Ms. Frantz stated that Mr. Brad France may view financial accounts and process payroll through QuickBooks when necessary, and that the bank noted that certain transactions, including wire transfers or purchases over \$1,000, require Ms. Frantz's authorization. Ms. Frantz stated that Mr. France does not have unrestricted authority to write checks or obtain loans in the business name.
 - b. Members also asked about changes to the bylaws, and Ms. Frantz stated that the amendments clarified controlling interest and voting authority consistent with equitable control.
- iv. **Subcommittee Vote**
- a. Member Jessie Martinez motioned to uphold denial, clarifying that amendments cannot be made after the fact and that there is no cure period. Motion second by Member Andrew Johnson. Motion approved by unanimous vote.
 - b. Certification denial upheld.

V. Public Comment

- None

VI. Adjournment

- Member Olivier Kamanzi made a motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Member Andrew Johnson. Motion carried by unanimous vote. Meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

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