



Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

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

APPROVED JAN 15 2026

NOTICE

State of Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

CEI MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

1:30 PM

Location: Jesse White State Building, 115 S. LaSalle St., 4th Fl., Lincoln Park Conference Room, Chicago, IL 60603

Location: Lincoln Tower Plaza, 524 S. Second St., Ste. 502, Springfield, IL 62701

WebEx

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

- Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 1:30 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.
- Chair Harris conducted roll call of the Commissioners.
 - i. Commissioners attending in person at a State facility:
 - 1. Chair Nina Harris
 - 2. Commissioner Richard Costes
 - 3. Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - 4. Commissioner Van Austin
 - 5. Commissioner Ovelia Smith-Barton
 - 6. Commissioner Bruce Montgomery
 - ii. Commissioner attending virtually:
 - 1. Commissioner Benjamin Salentine
 - iii. Commissioner Montgomery moved to approve the remote participation of Commissioner Salentine. Seconded by Commissioner Smith-Barton. Motion carried by vote.
 - iv. A quorum of the public body was present.

2. Minutes: November 19, 2025 (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to approve the minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Costes. Motion carried by vote.

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3. Operations Reports**A. Legislative Updates and Outreach Report – Nikita Richards, Internal/External Communications & Legislative Affairs Officer**

- The Outreach Unit continues to strengthen support for the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and Veterans Business Program (VBP) through proactive engagement with diverse businesses and collaboration with stakeholders statewide.
- Outreach is developing workshops for 2026 to meet the requests of stakeholders such as Bradley APEX Center, Joliet Community College, ComEd and the Rockford Airport Authority.
- The outreach campaign that builds on CEI's strategy to help increase BEP certification has been named Certify & Thrive 2026.
 - Will launch at start of 2026.
 - CEI has been laying the groundwork for some time, analyzing certification trends, listening to feedback, and building strategies to strengthen connections with firms that were previously certified.
 - The goal is to ensure that firms remain engaged, supported, and aware of the opportunities available to them.
 - The campaign includes:
 - Written communications
 - Social media post
 - Cross promotion with stakeholders
 - Host Agency Outreach and;
 - Phone banking
 - Commissioners volunteered to participate in outreach efforts for the campaign.
- Officer Richards shared past and upcoming outreach events.

B. Administrative Report – Robin Streets, Chief of Staff

- The Legislative Liaison position added to the careers page earlier in the month has since closed on December 16th. This role is designed to enhance and support the efforts of our Internal/External Communications & Legislative Affairs Officer.
- All 2026 office closure dates have been posted to the CEI website.
- 2026 meeting schedules will be posted to the website upon review of the CEI Commission and BEP Council.
- CEI Notice 2026.2 - BEP U-Plan Cures and Goal Waiver Guidance have been posted to the Reference and Resource Library webpage accompanied by a FAQs sheet.
 - The FAQ sheet has also been added to the Utilization Plan Section of the BEP & VBP Goal Compliance webpage.



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C. Financial and Human Capital Report – Tracey Kenney, Chief of Finance and Human Capital Officer

- FY2027 preparation of ISL's has begun and will be completed by mid-February 2026.
- The current headcount for the agency is 38 FTE's
- The Legislative Liaison position was reposted on Dec 3rd as the work location was corrected to Sangamon County.
- The Office Associate role
 - 10 Candidates are ready for panel interviews, which is tentatively scheduled for the week of December 15th.
- Administrative Assistant/Coordinator position
 - Bid record is complete, and CEI is awaiting CMS to perform randomization on the 100+ candidates to get 10 to 12 candidates for panel interviews.

D. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Compliance Unit and Veterans Business Program (VBP) Reports – Harry Reinhard, Compliance Manager

- Compliance has created a new manual for the new Goal Setting Form.
 - This is currently being reviewed and will be made available to agencies once approved.
- A new notice is currently being drafted for purchasing entities and prime vendors, providing guidance on the utilization plan process, including both the completion and submission of U-plans, as well as the procedures for requesting and evaluation BEP goal waiver requests.

E. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Certification Unit and Mentor Protégé Program (MPP) Reports – LaTasha Binder, CEI Deputy Director

- Certification Unit
 - The Certification Unit is actively working with Outreach on the upcoming awareness campaign aimed at increasing BEP certification participation.
 - a. The team has provided updates on messaging, clarified instructions, and ensured consistency with previous proactive communications sent to BEP firms.
 - b. The unit is working collaboratively with Outreach to leverage vendor and stakeholder networks, reinforce instructions for firms to update their information, and enhance public understanding of the certification process.



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- c. This coordinated effort is expected to improve application quality and broaden access to certification opportunities across the vendor community.
- The certification unit has announced a new training session on Understanding BEP Certification and Denial Letters.
 - a. This training is designed to provide BEP Council members with a clear understanding of the certification process, common application outcomes, and how to interpret certification and denial letters.
 - b. Two session options have been made available. Members may attend either session, as the content will be identical for both dates.
- Current BEP certified vendor pool:
 - a. 2,834 active certified vendors in the SDMP:
 - i. 864 African American owned firms
 - ii. 15 American Indian or Alaskan Native owned firms
 - iii. 407 Asian American owned firms
 - iv. 1,017 Caucasian American owned firms
 - v. 522 Hispanic American owned firms
 - vi. 9 Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander owned firms
- Mentor Protégé Program:
 - MPP unit is continuing to test unit operations. This includes application intake, external document uploads, scoring, program management, mentor/protégé relationship management and reporting.
 - MPP continues to focus on capacity building, technical knowledge, and competitive edge of minority and women-owned businesses through mentorship and developmental assistance.
 - Program management will continue to track interest in the program through the MPP interest form as we begin to reach out those interested entities.
 - Interest in the MPP program is as follows (as of 9/29/25):
 - a. 129 interested entities:
 - i. 22 self-identified as mentors
 - ii. 102 self-identified as proteges
 - iii. 5 who are unsure which category they fall in

4. Ongoing Business

- A. Illinois Hiring Practices (30 ILCS 574/40-10(4)) – Commissioner Enneddy Rivera

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- Looking forward to partnerships with higher education institutions across the State to engage students and provide an understanding of State employment pathways.

B. Veterans Business Program Committee – Commissioner Richard Costes

- The Committee met on December 11, 2025 to hear an appeal from a firm whose certification application had previously been denied.
 - The Committee reviewed the original reasons for denial and heard directly from the firm's owner.
 - The applicant provided clarifying information during the hearing.
 - The Committee determined that the firm met the eligibility requirements of the VBP and granted approval of the application.

C. Stakeholder Engagement Updates

- Commissioner Montgomery shared that he attended the most recent BEP Outreach Subcommittee meeting, and the committee continues to do work around how CEI and BEP can support businesses.

5. New Business**A. Scorecard Report – Commissioner Richard Costes**

- The scorecard is designed to track how entities across the state engage with BEP vendors. It will act as a transparency and accountability tool.
- This initiative will launch in January through a Statewide survey to agencies and public institutions of higher education.

6. Public Comment

- None.

7. Adjournment (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Austin. Motion carried by vote.
- Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 2:08 p.m.

