



Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

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

APPROVED MAR 18 2026

NOTICE

State of Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

CEI MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

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 Rivera 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: January 21, 2025 (Action)

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



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3. Operations Reports

A. Outreach Report – Nikita Richards, Internal/External Communications & Legislative Affairs Officer

- The outreach unit participated in the Capital Development Board Procurement Summit as a vendor hosting an informational table.
 - Delivered presentations on the Certify & Thrive Campaign.
 - Provided DBE vendors and vendors formerly certified under BE BEP with important instructions regarding BEP and VBP certification, recognition certification, registration and renewal.
- Outreach is developing two CEI led initiatives with the Minority Supplier Development Council (MSDC) Young Entrepreneurs and the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), in collaboration with the Certification Unit.
 - Future updates are forthcoming.
- Certify & Thrive Campaign:
 - For the month of January a total of 325 phonebank calls were made.
 - An average of 48% of calls have been completed.
 - 6,602 vendors have been contacted through campaign emails.
 - Stakeholder community and social media audience have been made aware of the campaign via strategic outreach and request to support.
- Officer Richards shared upcoming outreach events. All events can be found online on the Outreach Calendar.

B. Administrative Report – Tracey Kenney, Chief of Finance and Human Capital Officer

- FY25 Class Exemption requests were included on the full BEP Council agenda for the January 26 meeting.
 - An in-person quorum was not present; the Council was not allowed to take action. The meeting proceeded for informational purposes only.
- A bug fix was implemented on the BEP Class Contract Exemption Request form, and the updated link has now been posted on the Compliance webpage.
- CEI is actively updating its website to improve accessibility for users with disabilities.
 - Enhancements include modifications to documents currently used to apply for, gain access to, or participate in services, programs, or activities offered by the Commission, Business Enterprise Program, Veterans Business Program and Mentor Protégé Program.
- The Certification Unit will begin tracking data to monitor the rate at which application denials are reviewed by the Certification Subcommittee, as well as the rate at which those denials are overturned.



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- Tracking helps ensure the certification process is consistent, fair, and aligned with policy.
- Operations staff was notified of phishing attempts disguised as communications from the Commission on Equity and Inclusion that have been distributed to our vendor community.
 - CEI has worked with the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology's (DoIT) Division of Information Security to block the URL associated with this fraudulent link.
 - DoIT is also contacting the platform provider to have the page removed.

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

- FY2027 budget preparation of ISL's is in progress for the IL House & Senate respectively.
- Recruiting:
 - CEI is working with CMS to make an official offer for the Legislative Liaison position.
 - The Office Associate position will go through another panel of interviews due to a final candidate that did not pass the bilingual test for the position.
 - CEI is working with CMS to schedule panel interviews for the Administrative Assistant / Coordinator role.
 - CEI is working with CMS to validate a potential candidate for the Intake Specialist role.

D. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Compliance Unit and Veterans Business Program (VBP) Reports – Alica Gray, Compliance Officer

- The Compliance Unit is currently developing scripts for associated training videos for the new forms that will be distributed to agencies.
- The next Compliance Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for March 17th.
 - The Subcommittee will continue its review of FY26 Compliance Plans.
- BEP Compliance received 100% of the FY25 Annual Expenditure and Service Category reporting templates from agencies.
- The FY25 BEP expenditure has exceeded the FY24 total, with a total of \$1.6 billion validated.
 - This report will be ready for submission by March 1st.
- The new Class Exemption process is in effect as of January 5th. Once received, these requests will be presented to the full BEP council for approval.



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- Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB) and Service Disable Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) FY25 Annual Reports are currently under review and being developed into a comprehensive report for submission to the Governor's Office and the General Assembly.
 - This report will be ready for submission by March 1.
- Leadership is finalizing the new updated BEP and VBP forms

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

- Certification Unit
 - The Certification Unit is gearing up for internal training as well as developmental training for our partners at Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council.
 - The unit strengthened its reciprocal certification process by enhancing the efficiency of how the translation of industry codes are updated.
 - The Certification unit has now implemented an improved methodology that allows a single NAICS code to be mapped to multiple appropriate NIGP codes when supported by written verification from the official creators of the NAICS-to-NIGP crosswalk.
 - The Certification unit has also developed and amended crosswalk tracking system to document and monitor these enhanced approvals in real time.
 - a. This improvement expands vendor opportunities while maintaining program integrity and accuracy.
 - The certification unit has been able to reduce the overall application processing time going from 47 days to 42 days.
 - Current BEP certified vendor pool:
 - a. 2,782 active certified
- Mentor Protégé Program:
 - MPP unit is finalizing the testing of program operations.
 - a. This includes application intake, external document uploads, scoring, program management/monitoring, mentor/protégé relationship management, and reporting.
 - Testing is nearing completion.
 - a. Upon completion, the unit will move to the next phase of launch which is communication to those who have expressed interest in the program as a mentor.
 - Interest in the MPP program is as follows (as of 1/12/26):
 - a. 132 interested entities:



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- i. 22 self-identified as mentors
- ii. 105 self-identified as proteges
- iii. 5 who are unsure which category they fall in

4. Ongoing Business

- A. Success Stories & Vendor Engagement Activities – Commissioner Bruce Montgomery
 - Commissioner Montgomery has been collecting BEP and VBP success stories.
 - He is working with State agencies, colleges and universities to schedule speakers who would like to share their stories and highlight innovative programs and future Commission meetings.
 - Commissioner Montgomery continues to engage with small business partners, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunities, APEX Accelerators and SBDCs.
 - CEI continues to work closely with the City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs & Consumer Protection, and the City's Department of Procurement Services, the University of Chicago's entrepreneurship exchange and other community-based organizations focused on small business development.
- B. Illinois Hiring Practices (30 ILCS 574/40-10(4)) – Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - Commissioner Rivera extended thanks to the State agencies that are actively recruiting across the State via social media, job fairs and community events.
 - She also shared resources for anyone interested in working for the State.
 - Department of Central Management Services website.
 - Opportunities are available in a wide range of fields.
- C. Stakeholder Engagement Updates
 - Commissioner Salentine shared that he and Commissioner Costes have begun conversations with the Chicagoland Alliance for Disabled-Owned Businesses as well as a BEP Council member to better understand procurement barriers and opportunities for future collaboration.
 - Conversations currently focus on listening and gathering information.
 - Conversations will continue and will include CEI leadership.

5. New Business

- A. Procurement Scorecard 2026 Report – Commissioner Richard Costes
 - CEI launched the Scorecard Survey in January.
 - The survey is still open, and responses continue to come in.
 - This year's survey includes high value questions designed to help better understand how agencies are utilizing BEP and VBP participation.

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- This will help identify systemic barriers, highlight best practices and support agencies in moving from compliance towards continuous improvement.
- The expanded survey also incorporates forward-looking questions to identify any improvements or initiatives they plan to implement in the next fiscal year.
- Preliminary reviews have begun and Commissioner are preparing for the full analysis phase.

6. Public Comment

- Charles Harrell requested that the BEP goal on a DoIT invitation to bid for the JPMC for Metro Ethernet Transport Service be amended from 0% to 30% based on availability and practical participation. He states that the bid does not describe professional services but when unpacked there are a lot of professional services. He shares that it was stated that there were 19 BEP firms, but only one could provide the professional services. He says all of the firms can provide these services. He states that DoIT also put forth that a collective bargaining agreement would apply. He asked that this solicitation is reviewed.
- Dr. Arnold Crater shared that recently the State awarded a long-term tenure shelter market contract under the TOPS Program that totaled hundreds of millions of dollars. He does not believe the award outcomes reflect the intent of the disparity study that identifies utilization gaps of certain demographics. He requested a review of the TOPS evaluation and award process, a public analysis of how award outcomes align with disparity findings, a review of how master contracts concentrate impacts MBE and BEP goal alignment, consideration of cancelling, expanding or reopening the TOPS vehicle to ensure broader alignment, and implementation of policies that restrict the use of master service agreements.

7. Adjournment (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Austin. Motion carried by vote.
- Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.