



Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion

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

APPROVED MAY 20 2026

State of Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion CEI MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Wednesday, April 15, 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. Commissioner Richard Costes
 - 2. Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - 3. Commissioner Van Austin
 - 4. Commissioner Bruce Montgomery
 - ii. Commissioner attending virtually:
 - 1. Chair Nina Harris
 - 2. Commissioner Benjamin Salentine
 - 3. Commissioner Ovelia Smith-Barton
 - iii. Commissioner Austin moved to approve the remote participation of Commissioners attending remotely. Seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Motion carried by vote.
 - iv. A quorum of the public body was present.

2. Minutes: March 18, 2026 (Action)

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



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3. Stakeholder Spotlight: Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA) - Alexander D.

Buckles, Director of Business Diversity and Hilary Barker, Director of Procurement

- MPEA is a municipal corporation created by the Illinois General Assembly.
- MPEA owns:
 - McCormick Place
 - Hyatt Regency McCormick Place
 - Marriott Marquis Chicago
 - Wintrust Arena
 - Energy Center
 - Navy Pier (*owns but does not operate)
- Director Buckles shared MPEA's procurement and certification processes. It is not a certifying agency but accepts certifications from:
 - The City of Chicago, State of Illinois
 - Commission on Equity and Inclusion
 - Cook County
 - Chicago Minority Supplier Business Development Council
 - Women's Business Development Center
- Director Buckles shared a list of upcoming bid opportunities.

4. Operations Reports

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

- CEI met with the Illinois State Black Chamber of Commerce during their Lobby Day at the Capitol.
- Outreach will host a robust slate of workshops including:
 - BEP Pre-Certification Workshops, Procurement Opportunity Training Sessions, and the "Next Steps: Maximizing Your Certification" workshop.
 - These sessions equip vendors with the tools needed to navigate procurement bulletin boards, register with the Illinois Procurement Gateway, and connect with technical assistance providers such as the Illinois APEX Accelerators.
- CEI's Executive Director, Alexandria Wilson will present and provide an overview of CEI, notable FY25 BEP/VBP metrics, and CEI's new FY26 Notices to an audience of procurement professionals and purchasing entities during CPO-GS' "Aligning for Success" forum.
- CEI will co-host the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Lunch & Learn Webinar: Business Enterprise Program (BEP) on May 14th.



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- Certify & Thrive 2026 campaign progress:
 - Since January 2026, almost 1,338 calls were assigned and 84% have been completed as of March 2026.
- Officer Richards shared past and upcoming Outreach events. More info can be found on CEI's website.

B. Administrative Report – Robin Streets, Chief of Staff

- Agency leadership presented CEI's FY2027 appropriation request before the Senate Appropriations Committee on April 1.
- CEI issued Notices 2026.3, 2026.4, and 2026.5 to agencies and vendors.
 - These notices effectively rescind Notice 2023.3 and introduce updated BEP and VBP Utilization Plan and Waiver forms.
 - Notices are available on the CEI website.
- The Compliance Unit created training videos to assist agencies and vendors in completing the required documentation.
 - Training videos can be found on the Compliance webpage on CEI's website.

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

- Current staffing and recruitment efforts remain focused on advancing previously identified hiring priorities and maintaining operational continuity.
- CEI successfully completed its Senate Appropriations hearing on April 1.
- Preparation is now underway for the House Appropriations hearing on April 15.

D. Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Compliance Unit and Veterans Business Program (VBP) Reports – Jacob Perez, CEI Deputy Director

- The March 17 Compliance Subcommittee meeting was canceled due to lack of quorum.
 - The next meeting is scheduled for May 19 and will resume review and recommendations for the FY26 Compliance Plans.
- The Compliance team is updating the goal setting form and process, including development of a new goal setting manual and training video to support consistent implementation across agencies.
- Veterans Business Program Metrics:
 - 209 certified vendors
 - a. 36 African American owned
 - b. 1 American Indian owned
 - c. 9 Asian American owned



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- d. 138 Caucasian American owned
- e. 35 Hispanic owned
- Updated BEP and VBP forms manuals and training videos are available on the Compliance page of the CEI website.

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 participating in the Certify & Thrive campaign aimed at increasing BEP certification participation.
 - Weekly virtual office hours—offered in both English and Spanish—continue to provide direct assistance to vendors seeking guidance on certification requirements or one on one support.
 - The unit is also maintaining regular engagement with partner agencies to strengthen collaboration and stay informed about program updates.
 - Current BEP certified vendor pool:
 - a. 2,853 active certified vendors
 - The average application processing time takes approximately 46 days from start to finish which is 14 days under the allotted time by statute.
- Mentor Protégé Program:
 - MPP is preparing to connect with those who have expressed interest in the program as a mentor. This step aims to solidify mentor participation prior to engaging with potential protégés.
 - The MPP program continues to prioritize capacity building and technical skill development to strengthen the competitiveness of minority and women owned businesses.
 - MPP Metrics
 - a. Interest in the MPP program is as follows: As of 3/30/26
 - i. 135 interested entities:
 - 1. 22 Self-Identified as mentors
 - 2. 111 self-identified as proteges
 - 3. 5 who are unsure which category they fall into

5. Ongoing Business

- A. Illinois Hiring Practices (30 ILCS 574/40-10(4)) – Commissioner Ennedy Rivera
 - CEI had the opportunity to connect with John Chepulis, CMS Recruitment Manager, and Christopher Naranjo, CMS Statewide Manager for Latinx Diversity & Inclusion, to seek their guidance and support.



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- These conversations were incredibly helpful. They provided a clearer understanding of the work already happening within CMS as well as how CEI can best support those efforts.
- These discussions reinforced that this work is not done in isolation, it requires coordination, trust, and a willingness to listen and learn from one another.
- Progress remains steady and CEI is continuing to build a strong foundation that will allow this work to grow in a sustainable and impactful way.
- CEI will continue to nurture these relationships, engage closely with Employment Plan Councils, and take the next steps in shaping a pipeline that connects diverse talent to careers in public service.

B. Stakeholder Engagement Updates

- Commissioner Costes shared that he recently met with the Director of Illinois Guardianship Advocacy Commission to discuss the work that they do for people with disabilities throughout the State.
 - They are focused on protecting the rights of people with disabilities across the State through public guardianship and equal advocacy.
 - They assist families with navigating special education laws and investigating rights violations and complaints.
- Commissioner Montgomery shared that he attended a Veterans outreach event at the University of Chicago and spoke with the Chicagoland Veteran Business Owners organization.
 - They discussed working together to host events for members.

6. New Business

A. Procurement Scorecard 2026 Report – Commissioner Richard Costes

- Approximately 80% of agencies and Public Institutions of Higher Education have responded to the survey.
- Commissioners are currently in the analysis phase. When this phase is complete, Commissioners will begin to prepare a report of the survey findings.

B. 2028-29 State of Illinois Disparity study – Commissioner Benjamin Salentine

- In alignment with the BEP Act, CEI has been entrusted to conduct a new social scientific study that measures the impact of discrimination on minority and women business development in Illinois.
- CEI is currently in the process of finalizing the project plan timeline.
- The project plan is comprised of 4 phases:
 - Phase I – Research and Planning Phase
 - a. This phase has been underway since the beginning of the new year and remains ongoing.

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- Phase II – IGA/Contracting Phase
- Phase III – Conducting the Disparity Study & Report Development
- Phase IV – Report Release & Communications
- To date some actions taken in Phase I include:
 - Obtaining and analyzing solicitation documents; contract analysis; researching and subsequently analyzing other state's disparity studies and processes; and research and analysis of disparity study consultants and best practices.
 - Several meetings have occurred between commissioners and the CEI Operations Team.
- Milestones for the 2028-2029 State of Illinois Goods & Services Disparity Study
 - By December 31, 2028, CEI shall conduct a new social scientific study that measures the impact of discrimination on minority and women business development in Illinois.
 - By June 30, 2029, the Commission shall issue a report of its findings and any recommendations on whether to adjust the goals for minority and women participation established in this Act. Copies of this report and the social scientific study shall be filed with the Governor and the General Assembly.
 - By December 31, 2029, the Commission on Equity and Inclusion Business Enterprise Program shall develop a model for social scientific disparity study sourcing for local governmental units to adapt and implement to address regional disparities in public procurement.

7. Public Comment

- None.

8. Adjournment (Action)

- Commissioner Montgomery moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Rivera. Motion carried by vote.
- Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 2:34 p.m.