



BRUCE RAUNER  
GOVERNOR

JOHN MILLER  
DIRECTOR

STATE OF ILLINOIS

## DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMISSION

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July 26, 2016

Via email at [president@iadeaf.org](mailto:president@iadeaf.org)

Corey Axelrod  
President  
Illinois Association of the Deaf

Dear Mr. Axelrod:

Thank you for contacting IDHHC with your concerns outlined in your correspondence dated June 23<sup>rd</sup>, July 5<sup>th</sup> and July 25, 2016. The very day IDHHC received the initial correspondence, you were informed I was out of the office until July 5, 2016.

Since my return, IDHHC has received IAD's letters and FOIA requests, plus inundated with letters from IAD's campaign regarding concerns about the ISD Superintendent Search and my selections for a steering committee. Additionally, the Open Meetings Act prohibits the Commissioners as a group from engaging in discussion, including emails, regarding IAD's or the communities concerns outside of a public IDHHC meeting.

IAD has construed the delay in issuing a formal response as unwillingness or dismissive of the concerns of the Deaf community, which is clearly erroneous. IDHHC takes the concerns of IAD and of the community very seriously. It appears some of the information has been misconstrued within the community and it is important to clarify IDHHC's role involving ISD.

IDHHC has been in contact with the Governor Rauner's office regarding concerns with ISD since July 2015. Due to the ongoing turmoil and concerns expressed by the Deaf community, IDHHC recently had a meeting with Governor Rauner's Secretary of Education, Beth Purvis. It is clear the current situation is detrimental to both the students and ISD's ability to recruit qualified staff, including the current Superintendent search.

At the direction of Secretary Purvis, I was designated to assist the Governor's Office along with DHS/DRS with the following objectives:

1. ISD Superintendent Search & recruitment; and
2. Conduct a "Listening Tour" with ISD Teachers, Administrators, advisory board members, and parents of ISD students of their experiences at ISD.

This is a notable achievement and first step to setting up a partnership with both the Governor's Office and DHS/DRS to address concerns from the Deaf Community. Shortly thereafter, I met with DRS Director Kris Smith and ISD Interim Superintendent Serena Preston, to discuss how IDHHC could be of assistance.

While DHS/DRS has received a few applications for the Superintendent position, recommendations were made by the ISD Advisory Board to change the required qualifications for the ISD Superintendent position to broaden the pool of candidates. Unfortunately, this requires legislative action to accomplish. There is no way to anticipate if and when such changes would be made. Since filling the Superintendent vacancy is vital to ISD's future, the search and interviewing existing candidates must continue based upon current requirements.

DHS/DRS developed a new flyer based upon feedback and suggestion from the ISD Advisory Board. IDHHC is assisting in distributing the flyer and continue with recruitment efforts. Additionally, the existing applicants will be contacted and first round interviews scheduled. Those interviews will be conducted by DRS Director Kris Smith and ISD Interim Superintendent Serena Preston and me. At this time, no decisions have been made on who will be involved in the final round of interviews.

Additionally, IDHHC recommended changing the focus of the "Listening Tour" to gather information on personal experiences and atmosphere/environment at ISD and not directly related to the Superintendent search. It was quickly determined that the logistics for conducting such a "listening tour" was not feasible during the summer break and it will be conducted once school is back in session in the fall. IDHHC anticipates the "Listening Tour" will expose a broad range of issues. Some of which will require expertise in educational matters including administration, curriculum and teaching methods.

While IDHHC is well versed in matters of Deaf Culture and communication options, it is not an expert in educational techniques or administration. In order for IDHHC to make both informed and meaningful recommendations, I sought to recruit a neutral group of individuals not to debate the issues at ISD but to provide their expertise in educational matters. My goal was to select individuals who had the requisite background related to Deaf education and educational administration issues plus representation of both oral and ASL communication methods. I regret the blurb in the June Communication Matters did not accurately describe the intent of the steering committee. It was never the intent of IDHHC, DHS/DRS or Secretary Purvis for the informal steering committee to play an active role in the selection or hiring of the future ISD Superintendent.

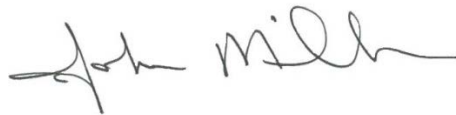
I personally contacted several of the individuals who expressed concerns regarding the ISD Superintendent search and steering committee. Some of the individuals indicated they were informed that the steering committee was comprised entirely of hearing individuals, which is the reason they consented to the letter being sent on their behalf. However, once I clarified its intent and that it was comprised of 2 deaf and 2 hearing individuals, they withdrew their concerns.

However, based upon the concerns expressed by the community, IAD, JCCD and ISDAA, I invited a representative from the Illinois School for the Deaf Alumni Association (ISDAA) to join the steering committee. IDHHC is pleased to announce the addition of ISDAA President, Susan Dramin-Weiss to the steering committee

IDHHC is committed to the needs of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind community and distressed by the positions expressed by IAD. IDHHC has always had an open door policy for the community to express concerns. It is no secret, that as a state agency, IDHHC has limitations and must conduct itself in accordance with State law. In the past few years, additional restrictions have been placed on all state agencies due to the State's budgetary situation. Unfortunately, there are times that IDHHC does not have the authority to intervene or change the outcome of a situation. While frustrating at times, these actions are not indicative of IDHHC "*consistently, knowingly and intentionally failed to represent the Deaf community...*"

However, furthering this ongoing diatribe is counterproductive to the goals of both IDHHC and IAD. IDHHC welcomes the opportunity to take this controversy and allow new partnerships and ideas to form. IDHHC program staff is available to meet with you or a representative of IAD to further programing discussions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and last name "Miller" clearly distinguishable.

John Miller  
Director

Cc: Beth Purvis, Secretary of Education  
Kris Smith, Director of Division of Rehabilitation Services  
Serena Preston, Interim Superintendent  
Theresa Fuller-Sakolsky, IDHHC Chair