

Yearly Report 2024

State of Illinois Commission on Environmental Justice



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Background

The [Illinois Environmental Justice Act \(415 ILCS 155/\)](#) established the Illinois Commission on Environmental Justice (EJ Commission). The principle of EJ requires that no segment of the population, regardless of race, national origin, age, or income, should bear disproportionately high or adverse effects of environmental pollution.

Section 10(d) of the Environmental Justice Act establishes the Commission’s duties. Those duties are:

1. Advise State entities on environmental justice and related community issues.
2. Review and analyze the impact of current State laws and policies on the issue of environmental justice and sustainable communities.
3. Assess the adequacy of State and local laws to address the issue of environmental justice and sustainable communities.
4. Develop criteria to assess whether communities in the State may be experiencing environmental justice issues.
5. Recommend options to the Governor for addressing issues, concerns, or problems related to environmental justice that surface after reviewing State laws and policies, including prioritizing areas of the State that need immediate attention.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency provides administrative support to the EJ Commission.

EJ Commission Membership

Statutory Agencies

1. *Jose Burgos* (designee), Illinois Department of Natural Resources
2. *Gerrin Cheek Butler* (designee), Illinois Department of Public Health
3. *David Esposito* (designee), Illinois Department of Human Services, Housing Office
4. *Brandy Phillips* (designee), Illinois Department of Transportation
5. *Chris Pressnall* (designee), Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

6. *Isabel Velez-Diaz* (designee), Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Elected Officials

7. *Sen. Celina Villanueva*, Senate Democratic representative
8. *Rep. Kimberly Du Buclet*, House Democratic representative
9. Vacant, Senate Minority Representative
10. Vacant, House Minority Representative

Governor Appointees

11. *Kim Wasserman*, Chair, affected communities concerned with environmental justice
12. *Rolando Favela*, member, public
13. *Donovan Griffith*, member, business organization
14. *Chynna Hampton*, member, labor organization
15. *Tonyisha Harris*, member, environmental organization
16. *Cheryl Johnson*, member, affected communities concerned with environmental justice
17. *Marcus Jordan*, member, labor organization
18. *Dulce Ortiz*, member, affected communities concerned with environmental justice
19. *Ashish Sharma*, member, expert on environmental health and environmental justice
20. *Victoria Young-Wilson*, member, affected communities concerned with environmental justice
21. Vacant, member, environmental organization
22. Vacant, member, business organization
23. Vacant, member, general public
24. Vacant, member, environmental organization, business organization, or general public

The EJ Commission is subject to the [Open Meetings Act](#) (OMA), which establishes requirements for conducting meetings, including the requirement to have a quorum to take official action. The EJ Commission is currently at quorum, with more than 13 out of the 24 voting members active. As of October 2024, the EJ Commission has a total of 6 vacancies, outlined above. EJ Commission members have been actively seeking additional members and encouraging interested parties to submit applications through the Boards and Commissions webpage.

2024 Quarterly Meetings & Significant Issues

EJ Commission meetings are open to the public and anyone interested may participate. The level of public participation throughout the meetings typically have not exceeded more than five people. Overall input from the public has enhanced the Commission's work through steering agenda topics and keeping the mission of advancing environmental justice efforts at the State a top priority. The EJ Commission meets quarterly (*see Appendix A for copies of 2024 agendas*). Links to past and upcoming meeting agendas, notices, recordings, and minutes can be found on the Illinois EPA [Commission on Environmental Justice meetings webpage](#).

Key topics discussed throughout 2024 meetings included the historic federal funding, grant, and technical assistance opportunities available to EJ communities. The EJ Commission heard a presentation from Blacks in Green (BIG), a Chicago-based organization that is one of the 16 Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (TCTACs) across the nation. To provide context, in 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) selected 16 TCTACs to remove barriers and improve accessibility for communities with EJ concerns, provide training and other assistance to build capacity for navigating federal grant application systems, provide guidance on community engagement, meeting facilitation, and translation and interpretation services for limited English-speaking participants, thus removing barriers and improving accessibility for communities with EJ concerns. BIG shared their experience and expertise on providing assistance to communities and their efforts in driving federal funding to the State of Illinois to advance EJ. Commissioners emphasized the importance of needing to share TCTAC resources with EJ communities, partners, and stakeholders across Illinois. To that end, Illinois EPA developed a [webpage](#) and distributed a [press release](#) intended to alert eligible entities to these funding opportunities and thereby increase federal investments in Illinois that will benefit EJ communities across the State.

Additionally, Illinois EPA this year provided numerous updates to the Commission on developments including the [Informal Resolution Agreement](#) (IRA) that Illinois EPA entered into with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). On February 14, 2024, Illinois EPA voluntarily entered into an IRA with U.S. EPA to resolve a civil rights complaint filed pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 concerning the Illinois EPA's issuance of an air construction permit for a metal shredder to be located on the Southeast Side of Chicago. Under the IRA, Illinois EPA committed to revising several of its plans and policies, including its 2018 Enhanced Public Participation Plan and its Language Access Plan to ensure that civil rights procedural safeguards are in place. Illinois EPA is working with Commission members to support their review of the draft Enhanced Public Participation Plan in preparation for their submission of comments on behalf of their organizations.

Lastly, the EJ Commission this year revisited and revised the [EJ questionnaire](#) (see *Appendix B*) that was sent in 2018 to state agencies on the Commission. The purpose of the questionnaire is for Commissioners to learn more about the degree to which state agencies have integrated EJ into their programs and activities, identify any gaps, and provide recommendations for improvements. Commissioners are hoping to vote on the final set of questions by the end of this year and discuss a path forward for collecting and analyzing the responses.

2019 – 2023 Meeting Topics, Brief Summaries

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illinois Solar for All Update• U.S. EPA Affordable Clean Energy Plan• Coal Ash Rulemaking Update | 2022 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illinois EPA Bureau of Water Triennial Review• DEI Training Overview• Chicago Cumulative Impacts Assessment Update |
| 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illinois EPA Compliance & Enforcement, Status of Inspections• Illinois EPA Hazardous Waste Education Program | 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• U.S. EPA environmental and climate justice funding, grant, and technical assistance opportunities• Chicago's Cumulative Impact Assessment• EJ legislation• Illinois EPA Office of EJ updates |
| 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No meetings held, COVID-related issues & no quorum | |

Goals for end-of-year 2024 – Year 2025

Illinois EPA, as the administrative support agency to the Commission, consulted with the Commission Chair, Kim Wasserman, on the goals outlined below. The goals are based on previous Commission meeting discussion topics and were shared with Commissioners in preparation for the August 28, 2024 quarterly meeting. Commissioners expressed their overall support of the goals during the quarterly meeting and no indication of opposition has been expressed.

- 1. Procedural Engagements**
 - Discuss, develop, and submit comments to State Agencies on their plans and policies (e.g., Illinois EPA's Draft Enhanced Public Participation Plan)
- 2. Work Products**
 - Analyze Commission State Agency responses to EJ-related questions developed by Commissioners to identify gaps and provide recommendations
- 3. Emerging Issues**

Appendix

Appendix A: 2024 Quarterly Commission Meeting Agendas



ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MEETING AGENDAS

Wednesday, March 13, 2024 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions/Roll Call
- III. Topics
 - Training Requirements
 - Open Meetings Act
 - Ethics & Harassment
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
 - U.S. EPA Funding, Grants, & Technical Assistance Opportunities
 - Examples of Potential EJ Questions for State Agencies
- IV. Open Discussion/Questions
- V. Next Meeting Dates and Location
- VI. Adjournment

Wednesday, June 5, 2024 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions/Roll Call
- III. Topics
 - Blacks in Green – Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center
 - Illinois EPA Office of EJ Updates
 - Update and Discussion on Potential EJ Questions for State Agencies
- IV. Open Discussion/Questions
- V. Next Meeting Dates and Location
- VI. Adjournment

Wednesday, August 28, 2024 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductions/Roll Call
- III. Topics
 - Illinois EPA Updates
 - Vote on EJ-related Questions for State Agencies + Path Forward
 - Discuss 2024 Commission Report
- IV. Open Discussion/Questions
- V. Next Meeting Dates and Location
- VI. Adjournment

Appendix B: EJ Questionnaire

1. How does your agency define environmental justice?
2. What screens does your agency use to identify EJ communities?
3. Do you consider environmental implications when working on an issue in your agency? For example, air, noise, and/or water pollution; soil contamination; nuisance odors; greenhouse gases; etc. If yes, please explain.
4. How does your agency determine or define the extent of environmental impacts on the community? Please provide examples.
5. Do you have an environmental justice mandate or policy for your agency? Yes/No. If yes, please explain.
6. Does your Agency assess the impact of projects on low-income communities and persons of color? If so, how?
7. Does your agency have programs that address the issues of access for people with disabilities?
8. Identify staff positions that work with communities of low-income; persons of color; and/or people with disabilities.
9. Does your agency have a community involvement/community engagement plan? If yes, explain the plan and specify whether it is general or project specific.
10. Is your agency currently getting public input on your EJ work? What is public facing?
11. How does your agency accommodate communities or persons who speak English less than very well? For example, providing an interpreter at a community meeting, translating documents, etc.
12. Does your agency partner with community interest groups, if so, who are they?
13. Can you give an example of an opportunity where your agency could partner with one or more agencies on the EJ Commission to address an environmental justice concern?