

Commission on Environmental Justice Fact Sheet

Introduction

This fact sheet outlines the brief history of the Commission on Environmental Justice (“the Commission”), the Commission’s composition, and the Commission’s duties.

Background

In 2011, the General Assembly passed the Illinois Environmental Justice Act, 415 ILCS 155 *et seq.*, which, among other things, created the Commission. The Environmental Justice Act included the legislative finding that “no segment of the population, regardless of race, national origin, age, or income, should bear disproportionately high or adverse effects of environmental pollution.” In light of that finding, the Commission is charged with advising State entities and the Governor on environmental justice issues. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is required to provide administrative and “other support” to the Commission. 415 ILCS 155/10(f).

Commission Membership

The Commission is comprised of twenty voting members, who represent various State agencies and the public. The Governor designates a Chairperson from the Commission’s members. Two members are State Senators: one appointed by the President of the Senate and the other appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate. Two members are State Representatives: one appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the other by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives. These members serve at the pleasure of the appointing officers.

The Governor appoints ten members of the public to the Commission. These members must represent at least one of the following interests: (1) affected communities concerned with environmental justice; (2) business organizations; (3) environmental organizations; (4) experts on environmental health and environmental justice; (5) units of local government; and (6) members of the general public who have an interest or expertise in environmental justice. 415 ILCS 155(a)(4). These appointments are not subject to Senate confirmation and serve a term of two years following appointment. Five members are subject to reappointment each year.

In addition, the Environmental Justice Act established six *ex officio* Commission members: the Director of Aging, the Director of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Director of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Director of Natural Resources, the Director of Public Health, and the Director of Transportation. Each Director may designate someone to serve on the Commission in his or her stead. These members serve for the duration of their Directorship or, in the case of a designee, at the pleasure of the relevant Director.

Commission Duties

The Commission has three primary functions: evaluating issues relating to environmental justice issues, meeting to discuss environmental justice issues, and reporting its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly. The Environmental Justice Act directs the Commission to evaluate environmental justice issues in the following contexts: (1)

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advising State entities on environmental justice and related community issues; (2) reviewing and analyzing the impact of current State laws and policies on environmental justice issues; (3) assessing the adequacy of State and local laws to address environmental justice issues; (4) developing criteria to assess whether communities in the State may be experiencing environmental justice issues; and (5) recommending options to the Governor for addressing environmental justice issues that surface after reviewing State laws and policies, including prioritizing areas of the State that need immediate attention. In order to evaluate these issues, the Commission is required to meet at least quarterly at the call of the Chairperson. In addition, the Commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on or before October 1 of each year.