

Governor's Rural Affairs Council Meeting Minutes

Locations

Illinois State Office Building

555 W Monroe Street, Champaign Room, 10th Floor

Chicago, IL 60661

Illinois State Capitol

Office of the Lieutenant Governor Stratton

401 South 2nd Street, Room 214

Springfield, IL 62706

Minutes August 19th, 2025

- 1. Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.**
 - a. She introduced Mahi and also congratulated Maria on being hired as the inaugural policy analyst at the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. She then directed Mahi to begin the roll call.**

2. Roll Call:

Attendance

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Present	Phone	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow		x	
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of	Tory Davis			x

Employment Security)				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative Extension Service)	Vacant			
Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		
Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Lorrie Karcher		x	
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			x

Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer		x	
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson			x
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			
Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Nikki Giancola-Shanks, Policy Director

Maria Peters, Policy Analyst

Mahi Patel, Dunn Fellow

Alex Sprinkle, ISPP Scholar

3. Approval of Minutes from November 2, 2023

a. 1st- Laura Kessel

b. 2nd- Todd Strole

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Yay	Nay	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Employment Security)	Tory Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x

Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative Extension Service)	Vacant			
Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		
Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Lorrie Karcher (Chris Meister)		x	
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			x
Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer		x	
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson		x	
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			

Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

4. Approval of Minutes from February 1st, 2024

a. 1st- Amy Bashiti

b. 2nd- Shawn Walsh

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Yay	Nay	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Employment Security)	Tory Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		

Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative Extension Service)	Vacant			
Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		
Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Chris Meister		x	
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			
Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer		x	
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson		x	
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			
Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

5. Approval of Minutes from November 14, 2024

- a. 1st- Ryan Tate
b. 2nd- Amy Bashiti

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Yay	Nay	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Employment Security)	Tory Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative Extension Service)	Vacant			

Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		
Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Lorrie Karcher (Chris Meister)		x	
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			x
Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer		x	
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson		x	
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			
Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

6. Approval of Minutes from May 14, 2025

- a. 1st- Shawn Walsh
- b. 2nd- Todd Strole
- c. Correction- Todd Strole said his name was consistently written incorrectly and asked for it to be corrected.

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Yay	Nay	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				

Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Employment Security)	Tory Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative Extension Service)	Vacant			
Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		

Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Lorrie Karcher	x		
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			x
Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer	x		
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson	x		
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			
Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

7. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

Opening

- The Lt. Governor welcomed everyone to the third quarterly meeting for the GRAC. She talked about the Illinois State Fair and thanked the Department of Agriculture for hosting a wonderful fair. She also mentioned the importance of Ag Connects Us All to the fair. She then spoke about the Ag Day celebration and getting to spend time with important stakeholders who move Illinois Ag forward.

She also emphasized the fear that many rural communities feel about the impact of actions coming from the Trump Administration. Specifically, the hits to the agriculture industry through tariffs, and the attacks against Medicaid and SNAP. She shared some data about the impact of the cuts in the federal budget and emphasized that over 330,000 Illinoisans will lose healthcare coverage, and 360,000 Illinoisans are at risk of losing SNAP coverage. She also mentioned that the cuts to SNAP will result in the loss of 18,000 jobs in the state.

She thanked the council for their work.

9. New Business

a. Approval of ByLaws for August 19, 2025

b. 1st- Amy Bashiti

c. 2th- Elizabeth Vogt

A present majority of filled member positions shall constitute a quorum: i.e. 12 members present				
Position	Name	Yay	Nay	Absent
Chair				
Chair (LG's Office)	Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton	x		
Agency/Institution Rep.				
Departmental Rep. (Dept. on Aging)	Elizabeth Vogt	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Agriculture)	Tyler Bohannon	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity)	Monica Bristow	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Employment Security)	Tory Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Human Services)	Diane Campbell			x
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Todd Strole	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Pub. Health)	Kristen Nolen	x		
Departmental Rep. (Dept. of Transportation)	Michael Vanderhoof	x		
Departmental Rep. (EPA)	Christine Davis	x		
Departmental Rep. (Community College Board)	Matthew Berry	x		
Departmental Rep. (State Board of Ed.)	Shawn Walsh	x		
Departmental Rep. (U of I - Cooperative	Vacant			

Extension Service)				
Departmental Rep. (Housing Development Authority)	Amy Bashiti	x		
Departmental Rep. (Southern IL University)	Laura Kessel	x		
Departmental Rep. (Institute for Rural Affairs [WIU])	Christopher Merrett	x		
Departmental Rep. (Finance Authority)	Lorrie Karcher (Chris Meister)		x	
Nonprofit Rep.				
Illinois Agricultural Association	Ryan Tate	x		
Rural Partners	Brian Moody	x		
Resident Rep.				
Citizen Rep.	Heather Hampton-Knodle			x
Citizen Rep.	Sonja Reece			x
Citizen Rep.	Norman Walzer		x	
Citizen Rep.	David Ardrey			x
Citizen Rep.	Neophansya Robinson		x	
Citizen Rep.	Vacant			
Guest (non-member)				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				
Guest				

The Lt. Governor thanked Dr. Lyons and Illinois Humanities for their presentation at the last meeting. She said she was excited to work with them to promote towns, celebrations, and organizations in rural Illinois for the upcoming Illinois 250th and Route 66 celebrations.

The Lt. Governor explained that she would like to move to vote on the updated bylaws for the Council. A copy of the bylaws was sent out in advance. The updated bylaws would remove the requirement to vote on every item on the

agenda individually, making it so that a voice vote will suffice for approval for the Council meeting agenda.

Amy Bashiti motioned to approve the bylaws. Elizabeth Vogt seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

The Lt. Governor announced that today's presenter would be Mahi Mahmood from the Illinois Department of Human Services and Emma Watters Reardon from Illinois Healthcare and Family Services.

Presentation 1:

Emma Watters Reardon explained the state of Medicaid in Illinois and discussed the impact of H.R 1 to Medicaid in Illinois. The changes affect financing and coverage and specifically how state directed payments must be phased down to 100% of Medicare payment levels. She concluded by talking about the Rural Health Transformation Program and how it could be a potential path forward for Illinois.

Presentation 2:

Mahi Mahmood discussed the impact of the funding cuts in H.R. 1 to SNAP benefits. The changes in HR 1 will increase Illinois' state liability for cost sharing due to the state's high payment error rate. She concluded by discussing the path forward and potential methods to reduce the state's error rate.

Q&A

Chris Meister noted previous bonds for smaller hospitals such as Farel and Harrisburg, and asked how many hospitals of that category are at risk for closure. Emma Watters Reardon said that nine hospitals in Illinois are at –risk of imminent closure, but that is not comprehensive and more discussion is needed to make a more comprehensive estimate. Dani Menendez mentioned some useful data from a recent article about hospitals at-risk for closure.

The Lt. Gov mentioned how the closure of rural hospitals affects everyone and especially the impact on birth equity. She said that access to maternal healthcare will fall significantly.

Amy Bashiti asked about rural healthcare systems dropping specific medical programs, such as pediatrics and cardiology, and what the impacts of that will be. Emma Watters Reardon responded by mentioning the downstream impacts of Medicaid cuts and how it will reduce access for most people who rely on the rural healthcare systems. Amy also asked if we know what the new approval and application system looks like and whether we know the process for getting the

approval. Emma mentioned that they are not fully sure and the other half of the funding will be dispersed at the CMS director's discretion.

Liz Vogt mentioned other cuts that are present in the bill and how the bill will erode the entire social services system. The state is not in a position to replace all the funds being lost from this bill. Liz, Emma, Mahi, and Lt.Gov discussed the impacts of this on older adults.

Ryan Tate asked about the preferred rate and how the breakdown of dollars from federal and state governments looked like. Emma responded by explaining how they need to bring down state payments to 100% of the federal rate. Ryan continued to ask about the possibility of Illinois reducing the error rate.

The Lt. Gov remarked on the increased administrative burden on states from this bill.

Nikki asked the speakers what GRAC could be doing to help. Dani Menendez mentioned stakeholder calls and asked if the council could find additional stakeholders and if the council could participate in some listening sessions with stakeholders.

Shawn Walsh asked if IDHS and HFS are working with non-profits and local/community organizations to get the word out. The speakers mentioned their work with the Greater Chicago Food Depository. The Lt. Gov mentioned the recent events hosted by her office around SNAP cuts and Medicaid cuts.

The Lt. Governor thanked the speakers and also the council for the work they do to improve the lives of rural Illinoisans.

10. Discussion Points

The Lt. Governor requested that the committee provide updates.

Amy Bashiti from the **Economic Development & Infrastructure Committee** mentioned that the committee is working on finding contacts for the IL 250th celebration. Norman Walzer mentioned potentially hosting a series of webinars regarding business succession in rural areas. He also mentioned working on the agenda for the conference next year. He asked if anyone had any suggestions.

The Lt. Gov thanked Amy and Norm for their report.

Christopher Merrett provided updates on items working with the **Education and Workforce Development Committee**. He mentioned the importance of

understanding what rural education means and teaching stakeholders about rural development. He said the Midwest Community Institute was a success and discussed how it helped increase capacity building for rural businesses. He also mentioned the briefs the subcommittee has been writing about different topics that effect rural communities. He also said the committee is working on a report on rural workforce development. He mentioned that 14 mapping communities are along Route 66 and he is thinking about ways to integrate this with the work the office is doing.

Lt. Governor thanked Chris for the report. She mentioned that Route 66 commission is looking for communities to highlight and how outreach is necessary to get them involved.

Laura Kessel shared the work of the **Health and Healthcare Committee**. Laura mentioned that her committee is trying to secure funding for some events, specifically a documentary+panel discussion event on dementia. She mentioned that Liz Vogt has another documentary on older adults as well.

The Lt. Gov thanked Laura for her report.

11. Member Updates

Liz Vogt said that the Ageing Conference was October 15th and 16th in Peoria. Also discussed stakeholder discussions on Better Aging through the month of October.

Matthew Berry shared that the Illinois College Board kicked off the 60 years of Community College celebration at the State Fair. Illinois is the third-largest community college system in the country.

Ryan Tate mentioned that the Illinois Farm Bureau will be doing the Rural Development Grant again this year. He said he will have more information at the next meeting.

Shawn Walsh mentioned that school started this week and asked that everyone thank a teacher.

Todd Strole said that they are working on developing a high school vocation program for natural resources. He mentioned that there is an Illinois Farm River community forum.

12. Public Comments

Alex Benishek mentioned that the city of Mattoon went through a bad water crisis and said that the residents of Mattoon did not have the drinkable water for ten days. He thanked IEMA and asked whether the state would consider offering grants for cities affected by algae blooms.

The Lt. Gov thanked Alex for his comment.

13. Closing

The Lt. Governor reminded everyone the next Council meeting will take place on October 15th at 10 AM. The meeting is planned to be held in Springfield and Chicago.

14. Motion to Adjourn

a. 1st- **Ryan Tate**

b. 2nd- **Sonja Reece**

The committee approved the motion to adjourn through a voice vote.

The meeting came to end at 11:26.