

Illinois Council on Women and Girls

Chaired by Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

Annual Report 2022



Office of Lt. Governor
Juliana Stratton

Letter from the Chair – Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

“Women belong in all places where decisions are being made.”
– Ruth Bader Ginsburg

The Illinois Council on Women and Girls is dedicated to addressing the barriers negatively impacting women, girls, and nonbinary people as we build the pathways for an equitable, brighter future. It is critical that we meet this moment, as we face the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic challenges, the trauma of gun violence in communities, and the dialing back of reproductive rights following the reversal of Roe v. Wade by the U.S. Supreme Court. As chair of the Council, I am proud of our collective spirit and our determination to create positive change.

The Illinois Council on Women and Girls continues to stand with communities affected by these issues while digging in to push forward on the development of initiatives. From the launch of the “Know Your Rights” campaign to share resources and information for diverse groups statewide that could be impacted by gender-based violence, to planning efforts with the aim of curbing gun violence, the Council is focused on responding to promote a better quality of life in Illinois.

In this report, you will find highlights of the projects and plans of each sub-committee of the Council. I am excited to share that we have completed the selection process for the 2022-2023 Girls Committee, so that young people will continue to have a voice on the issues that impact them and add to the rich diversity represented within the state and nation.

I express my gratitude to all the members of the Council for the work that they have put into ensuring the functioning of both their committees and the Council, as well as my staff for their enduring support. As we face the new year, we will take the next steps in our unwavering commitment to gender equity. I look forward to continuing to lean into the work and advocate for change by building the pathways to uplift those who have too often been silenced and ignored.

Respectfully,



Juliana Stratton
Illinois Lieutenant Governor
Chair, Illinois Council on Women and Girls



Lt. Governor Stratton with farmer Natasha Coleman at Star Farm Chicago – photo taken August 2022.

Executive Summary

Pursuant to 20 ILCS 5130/30, this report from the Illinois Council on Women and Girls (the “Council”) describes the creation, membership of the Council, and activities the Council conducted. The progress made on the Council’s policy and advocacy recommendations was provided to the Governor and General Assembly. The Council furnishes this report and its recommendations to improve the lives of women and girls as they relate to the four issue-based committees the Council opted to create, which include: 1) Gender-Based Violence, 2) Health & Healthcare, 3) Leadership & Inclusion, and 4) Academic & Economic Opportunity.

Council Overview and Activities

The Illinois State Legislature established the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act sponsored by Senator Jacqueline Collins and Representative Anna Moeller. The statute mandates that the Council “advise the Governor and General Assembly on policy issues and initiatives impacting the lives of women and girls in Illinois.”¹ The statute establishes a 32-member Council composed of ex-officio members representing state agencies as well as individuals appointed by the Governor and the General Assembly.

Recommendations and Progress

In 2019, the Council’s Inaugural year, the committees made a total of 14 recommendations. There were four related to gender-based violence, four related to academic & economic opportunity, three related to leadership & inclusion, and three related to health & healthcare. In 2021, the Council continued to build on these recommendations to advise the Governor’s Office and General Assembly on ways to advance policies that improve the lives of women and girls throughout Illinois. While advancing issue-based recommendations, the Council formed a Girls Committee in 2021 to represent the voices of Illinois youth in the policy-making process. In 2022, the Council continued its work as members used their

voices in advocacy aimed at shaping the efforts of essential initiatives. These include women in the workforce; mental health awareness; reproductive rights and health; backing women in the armed forces; and more. In addition, the Council hosted a “Know your Rights” webinar, had a presentation from the Girls in the Game organization, and held its 4th Quarter Council meeting at Chicago Women in Trades, featuring various speakers.

Report Structure

This report restates the recommendations that were published in the 2021 Council on Women and Girls Report and discusses the progress that has been made by the Council on the recommendations in each issue area. It concludes with information on the Girls Committee as well as an update on state-level policy developments that are relevant to the Council’s work.



Lt. Governor Stratton (center right) stands with Director of the Women’s Bureau in the U.S. Department of Labor Wendy Chun-Hoon (center); Illinois Department of Labor Acting Director Jane R. Flanagan (right); Chicago Women in Trades Executive Director Jayne Vellinga (second from right); Director of the Center for Women’s Employment Equity at Chicago Women in Trades Lauren Sugarman (third from left); and other key stakeholders at the Chicago Women in Trades – photo taken May 2022.

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Lt. Governor Stratton with Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs’ Operations and Programs Division Manager Danielle N. Luevano (left) and Senior Program Manager/Women’s Veterans Coordinator Kourtney Hopkins at the Illinois State Fair – photo taken August 2022.

Council Overview and Activities

The goal of the Council, pursuant to the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act (20 ILCS 5130/30), is to advise the Governor and the General Assembly on policy issues and initiatives impacting the lives of women and girls in Illinois. This mandate includes, but is not limited toⁱⁱ:

- Advancing civic participation of women and girls in Illinois.
- Advocating for programs and policies that work to end the gender pay gap and discrimination in professional and academic opportunities.
- Promoting resources and opportunities for academic and professional growth.
- Improving legal protections and recourse regarding sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Reducing violence against women.
- Improving standards of, and access to, healthcare in general and reproductive healthcare in particular.
- Researching the various points of impact a lack of access to healthcare has on the lives of women and girls.
- Improving protections for transgender individuals, especially protections against violence and harassment.
- Increasing fair and equal access to culturally competent healthcare, housing, employment, and other factors related to the quality of life.
- Disseminating information to, and building of relationships with, state agencies and commissions in furtherance of the Council's goals; and
- Increasing attention around the inclusion of women, especially those of color, in decision-making capacities.

Council Composition

The Illinois Council on Women and Girls is composed of the following 32 members:

- 16 public members appointed by the General Assembly
 - 4 appointed by the House Speaker
 - 4 appointed by the House Minority Leader
 - 4 appointed by the Senate President
 - 4 appointed by the Senate Minority Leader
- 1 representative of the Governor's Office appointed by the Governor
- 4 public members appointed by the Governor
- 11 ex-officio members or their designees
 - Lieutenant Governor
 - Chief of the Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Services, Department of Human Services
 - Director, Executive Director or Superintendent of the following State Agencies:
 - Department on Aging
 - Department of Human Rights
 - Department of Children and Family Services
 - Department of Healthcare and Family Services
 - Department of Public Health
 - Department of Labor
 - State Board of Education
 - Board of Higher Education
 - Community College Board

Membership

Below are the public members appointed to the Council at the time of the creation of this report.

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, Chair	Ex-Officio Member
Lilian Jimenez	Ex-Officio Member
Katherine Ostrowski	Ex-Officio Member
Marla Courts	Ex-Officio Member
Director Theresa Eagleson	Ex-Officio Member
Marina Faz-Huppert	Ex-Officio Member
Jaclyn Matthews*	Ex-Officio Member
Director Ginger Ostro	Ex-Officio Member
Natasha Allan	Ex-Officio Member
Dr. Chris Smith	Ex-Officio Member
Shannon Laightner	Ex-Officio Member
Sameer Vohra	Ex-Officio Member
Deputy Governor Sol Flores	Governor's Office Representative
Alexa Rice	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Dr. Sharon Latiker	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Nikita Richards*	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Veronica Espina	Public Member (Governor Appointed)
Ines Kutlesa*	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Rhonda Thomas	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Theresa Forthofer	Public Member (Minority Leader of the House Appointed)
Maaria Mozaffar*	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Wendy Pollack	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Kaethe Morris Hoffer	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Felicia Blakley	Public Member (Speaker of the House Appointed)
Dr. Vidhya Prakash*	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)

Monique Garcia	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)
Pamela Althoff	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)
Brandy Donaldson	Public Member (Minority Leader of the Senate Appointed)
Sylvia Matos-Collins	Public Member (President of the Senate Appointed)
Amina Jaffer	Public Member (President of the Senate Appointed)
Rochelle Crump	Public Member (President of the Senate Appointed)
Sylvia Collins	Public Member (President of the Senate Appointed)
Ibie Hart*	Guest Member
Kelly Fair	Guest Member
Char Rivette	Guest Member
Senator Jacqueline Collins	Guest Member
Representative Anna Moeller	Guest Member
Sophie Zerrouki	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Jisel Ortiz	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Jasmin Mundi	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Leslie Smith	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Eden Soto	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Gloria Jen	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Ala'a Tamam	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Addison Belhomme	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member
Wendy Riley-Washington	Guest Member, Girls' Committee Member

**Denotes committee chair/co-chairs*

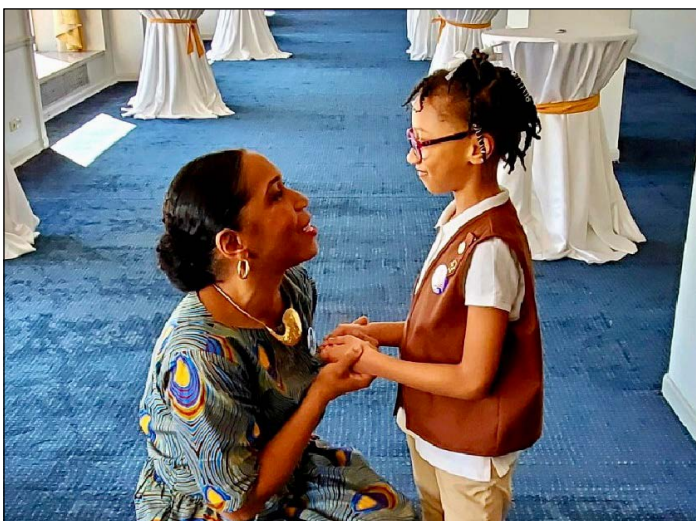
Guest members are individuals who are not formally appointed but who are active with the Council. Guest members do not have a vote in official Council business. They are encouraged to participate in the meetings and may serve on committees formed by the Council.

The Creation and Convening of the Illinois Council on Women and Girls

Created by Illinois State Senator Jacqueline Collins and Representative Anna Moeller, the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Act was signed into law in 2018. At its inaugural event in 2019, Governor JB Pritzker appointed Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton as the first chair of this Council.

In 2022, the Council held four quarterly meetings, which took place on February 15th, May 17th, August 16th, and December 13th. The first and second quarterly meetings convened virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The third and fourth quarter meetings were held in a hybrid format (in-person and online).

Convening both virtually and in person, the Council carried forward recommendations, had key topic conversations, and began to plan for future initiatives through its sub-committees. These four issue-based committees are: 1) Gender-Based Violence, 2) Health & Healthcare, 3) Leadership & Inclusion, and 4) Academic & Economic Opportunity. The committees convened virtually between Council meetings to discuss how to advance their recommendations.



Lt. Governor Stratton speaks with a Girl Scout on the importance of ensuring young girls of Illinois are supported and empowered.

Recommendations and Progress Updates

Gender-Based Violence Committee

Sexual and gender-based violence “refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships,”^{iii, iv} including acts of domestic violence. The Gender-Based Violence Committee of the Council aims to reduce brutality against women, girls, and non-binary people, along with building partnerships for better state-wide resources for residents who are survivors of gender-based violence.

Recommendations:

The Committee continues to work on the following four recommendations regarding Gender-Based Violence:

1. Improving efficiencies for publicly funded crime laboratories to reduce sexual assault-kit backlogs.
2. Increasing visibility and support networks by implementing public awareness campaigns about gender-based violence and available resources in rural communities with messaging targeting veterans, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ communities.
3. Tracking the prevalence of gender-based violence across the State by collaborating with local governments.
4. Reducing the overall trauma associated with gender-based violence by ensuring that elementary and secondary school students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of gender-based violence can safely stay in school, succeed academically, and complete their education.

Progress Update:

In 2021, the Gender-Based Violence Committee recommended increased efforts be made to reduce the

backlog in testing and processing of the Illinois State Police Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits. On June 3rd, 2022, Governor JB Pritzker announced that Illinois is now in compliance with the law requiring DNA evidence in rape cases to be tested within six months. In line with this, the Illinois State Police plans to open new crime labs in Joliet and Decatur.

Moving forward to make progress on recommendations, the Gender-Based Violence Committee developed a “Know Your Rights” campaign. This campaign identified resources for people impacted by gender-based violence, educated and helped individuals understand their legal rights, and raised awareness around gender-based violence across the State. On March 22nd, 2022, the Gender-Based Violence Committee held the first “Know Your Rights” campaign event; co-hosted with Ines Kutlesa, Chair of the Gender-Based Violence Committee; and moderated by Amanda Pyron, Executive Director of The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence. This inaugural event brought together leaders and advocates to provide a general overview of what gender-based violence is, how to identify gender-based violence and other warning signs, and what a survivor’s legal rights are when facing this issue. Speakers included Vickie Smith, President and CEO of the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Erin Walton, Executive Director of Resilience; Nastasha Powers, Medical & Legal Advocate for the YWCA of McLean County’s Stepping-Stones Program, and Esmeralda Gonzalez, a community organizer from Chicago.

The Committee has set the agenda and selected speakers for the second “Know Your Rights” campaign event that will take place in early 2023. Additionally, the distribution of digital content will amplify the work of the campaign.

Academic & Economic Opportunity Committee

The Academic & Economic Opportunity Committee focuses on policies and programs that break down barriers and build pathways for women to succeed academically, professionally, and economically. Increased financial pressures, supply chain and workforce demand, along with school supply needs, have made this Committee’s mission even more pressing today.

Recommendations:

The Committee continues to work on the following four recommendations regarding Academic & Economic Opportunity:

1. Empowering girls and young women by creating opportunities for them to engage with the executive branch on issues important to their communities.
2. Integrating efforts to better serve students and parents on and around Illinois military bases by increasing collaboration among existing institutions, like the Illinois Educational Opportunities for Military Children Council and the Military Economic Development Committee.
3. Allowing more women to enter and remain in the workforce by increasing access to affordable childcare, especially for working women and women in school.
4. Encouraging girls and women to pursue higher education to increase their wage potential by creating greater opportunities for trauma-informed services for students who experience gender-based violence.



The first installment of the “Know Your Rights” campaign’s virtual series held during Women’s History Month in 2022.

Progress Update:

The Academic & Economic Opportunity Committee focused on its first recommendation to bring the voices of girls to the executive branch with the creation of the Girls Committee, an advisory group made up of high school-age girls. The Girls Committee heard from Rep. Katie Stuart about her advocacy for expanding access to childcare and higher education. Representatives from ExceleRate spoke about the state's online platform to search for high-quality childcare centers. The Girls Committee joined the Council in making recommendations for issue-based efforts, particularly encouraging mental health advocacy and specific strategies for improving the accessibility of ExceleRate.

Leadership & Inclusion Committee

The Leadership & Inclusion Committee works to construct avenues for women and girls to access leadership opportunities in all fields.

Recommendations:

The committee continues to work on the following three recommendations regarding Leadership & Inclusion:

1. Encouraging the involvement of women and girls in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) career pipelines by examining existing and new opportunities for entry. Specifically, opportunities to enter STEAM career pipelines should be focused on access for current and former youth in foster care, youth with disabilities, youth from LGBTQ+ communities, immigrants and refugees, and racially diverse groups.
2. Informing school groups about how engagement in our systems of government can expand opportunities for underrepresented people by utilizing local youth advisory boards led by elected leaders.
3. Improving professional opportunities by encouraging the expansion of internships targeting young women through partnerships between schools and high-growth industries.

Progress Update:

In 2022, the Committee prepared and began the early phases of implementation of its "Girls Lead Program." As noted in its application: "The Illinois Girls Lead Program is a three-tiered mentorship program run by the Office of the Lt. Governor, the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, and in partnership with the women State Senators and Representatives of the Illinois General Assembly. The program's mission is to inspire and elevate the leadership skills of Illinois girls in elementary, middle school, and high school so that they may harness the opportunity to learn from Illinois General Assembly Women. The program is looking for passionate, dedicated students who show promising leadership and vision, and who will thrive if allowed to learn from women leaders within the state of Illinois' highest representative elected assembly. We value the necessity for diversity in thought, experience, background, and qualifications in this mentoring program as we know not all circumstances and experiences are the same as foundational necessities of leadership."

The Leadership & Inclusion Committee will partner with state legislators to identify school districts willing to participate in the Illinois Girls Lead mentoring program. To date, between 25-30 legislators have signed up to participate and host girls during the 2023 Spring semester. Applications for the Girls Lead Program will be launched and reviewed by February, with plans to host its first meeting in March 2023.

Health & Healthcare Committee

The Health & Healthcare Committee recommended policies related to health and healthcare access for women and girls in Illinois.

Recommendations:

The Committee continues to work on the following three recommendations regarding Health & Healthcare:

1. Expanding access to postpartum healthcare coverage to help reduce disparities.

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2. Increasing access to substance use and mental health services for pregnant and postpartum women to reduce rates of maternal morbidity.
3. Highlighting healthcare disparities by improving data collection.

Progress Updates:

The Health & Healthcare committee continues to engage state leaders who participated in their first-ever health equity summit. The committee and summit participants provided invaluable feedback to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Health Equity Task Force Data Committee on recommendations for racial and ethnic minority data improvement. This effort led to an invitation to join

the IDPH Health Equity Task Force Data Committee meetings to join forces in vitally important health equity work. Notably, members of the Council's Girls Committee were engaged in the process and discussions. On July 4th, 2022, the Illinois suburb of Highland Park was rocked with a devastating mass shooting. Since then, this committee has taken up the call to discuss strategies to curb firearm violence. A formal statement (to be released in 2023) calling for laws and initiatives to prevent violence due to firearms is underway. In addition, the committee will host a two-part webinar series, during National Gun Violence Awareness month (2023), with a focus on firearm safety and support for victims and their families.



From left, Team Stewart Captain Breanna Stewart and Co-Captain Sue Bird, WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Lt. Governor Stratton, and Team Wilson Co-Captain Sylvia Fowles and Captain Aja Wilson at the 2022 WNBA All Star Game – photo taken July 2022.

Girls Committee

The Girls Committee provides input on the Council's existing work, including reports and programming, while pursuing their own projects as a standing committee. On July 29th, 2022, Lt. Governor Stratton held a special Girls Committee appreciation session. At this virtual event, members of the Girls Committee shared their testimonies and reflections as the inaugural Girls Committee. Jaclyn Matthews, committee chair, gave words of encouragement and Lt. Governor Stratton held a "word of wisdom and questions" chat with girls. Afterwards, Lt. Governor Stratton and staff expressed thanks to each member of the committee and shared the application timeline for the next Girls Committee.

Following this, the 2022-2023 Girls Committee applications were released in early September with a deadline of October 31st, 2022, through the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)'s Submittable portal. A review committee consisting of Council members Jaclyn Matthews, Nikita Richards, Marla Courts, and Jisel Ortiz and Lt. Governor's Office staff reviewed 74 fully completed applicant submissions. The applications spanned the geographical regions of Illinois and represented varying backgrounds and life experiences. The review committee conducted interviews and selected 19 new girls in grades 9-12 and notified the girls of their opportunity to serve. The new Girls Committee members were invited to attend the final and 4th Quarter Council meeting held on December 13th, 2022. The new members of the Girls Committee were formally congratulated and announced via social media and press release.

Many thanks to the steering committee of Council members, led by Jaclyn Matthews, to complete the new Girls Committee application process. The steering committee maintained the goals of diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in an online application, making it as open and accessible as possible to girls across the state. Social media promotion graphics were shared with other Council members to promote the application in their networks.

Progress Updates:

The newly selected 2023 members on the Girls Committee will serve on the four issue-based committees of the Council. They attend Council and sub-committee meetings and give their input, and they will meet as a standing committee to develop their own platform for the coming year.

Reproductive Rights in Illinois

As the Illinois Council on Women and Girls continued to work and stay focused on issues and topics impacting millions of Illinoisians, the United States Supreme Court reversed the 50-year landmark decision of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24th, 2022. Because of this decision, reproductive rights – specifically abortion rights—were now left up to individual states. In 2019, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the right to abortion in the Illinois constitution.

Following the reversed decision, Governor Pritzker and Lt. Governor Stratton both released formal statements emphasizing continued support of reproductive rights, including abortion. To date, Illinois remains one of few Midwest states protecting these rights for women.

Furthering this cause, Lt. Governor Stratton also held an internal women's debrief and later served as a testimonial witness before the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington, D.C., on July 12th, 2022. Lt. Governor Stratton outlined Illinois' proactive legislation and steadfast support to protect women's rights, as well as the impact of the reversing *Roe v. Wade*:

"[Illinois is] not just an oasis of reproductive care, but an island... It looks like disenfranchised yet determined patients coming from every surrounding state, but also from as far away as Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida. It looks like the entire staff in our state's abortion clinics are fielding phone calls for appointments because the number of out-of-state patients has doubled since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned." – Senate Judiciary press release

Next Steps

The Council will remain focused on its recommendations and will continue to partner with organizations, state agencies, the legislative body, as well as women and girls across the state to further gender-conscious policy and advocacy. As various national and statewide issues occur, the Council will work to center the voices of women, girls, and non-binary residents in Illinois policymaking.

Acknowledgments

The Illinois Council on Women and Girls is made up of appointed and ex-officio members who contributed their time, talent, and ideas to the work of the Council and this report. The Council is extremely grateful to the governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, and companies that gave their time to support the Illinois Council on Women and Girls. The Office of Lieutenant Governor Stratton served in an administrative capacity to support all works of the Council.



Lt. Governor Stratton (center) joins Attorney General Kwame Raoul (center left), Governor JB Pritzker (center right), and advocates and reproductive health providers at a roundtable focused on abortion rights and access hosted by Vice President Kamala Harris – photo taken September 2022.

References

Editor's note: discrepancies in how studies obtained data limit continuity for statistics related to sex and gender referenced in this report. This report uses the terms such as women, cisgender women, and female according to terms used from the source material for supporting data.

ⁱ Illinois General Assembly. (2018.) *Illinois Council on Women & Girls Act (20 ILCS 5130)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=3893>. Accessed on February 23rd, 2021

ⁱⁱ Illinois General Assembly. (2018.) *Illinois Council on Women & Girls Act (20 ILCS 5130)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=3893>. Accessed on February 23rd, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/dem/releases/lieutenant-governor-of-illinois-testifies-on-how-the-dobbs-decision-is-already-harming-individual-states>
Accessed on December 8th, 2022

^{iv} <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/7/12/23205110/abortion-roe-wade-julianna-stratton-supreme-court-dobbs>
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Office of Lt. Governor
Juliana Stratton

Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois 12/22 IOCI 23-0683 