

# Bill focuses on increasing supplier diversity in energy projects

By GRACE KINNICUTT  
Capitol News Illinois

SPRINGFIELD – Aiming to increase diversity in wind and solar jobs, a proposed measure in the Illinois General Assembly would require more transparent reporting on the level of participation of minority-owned businesses in clean energy jobs.

Rep. William Davis, D-Hazel Crest, advanced House Bill 4217 through the House Energy and Environment Committee in February. The measure aims to increase “diverse participation in projects that could include African-Americans, Latinx, and women-owned firms.”

In the bill, energy suppliers who generate more than 500 kilowatt hours of electricity with at least 100,000 customers and companies that develop, install, or maintain a renewable energy project with annual revenues over \$15 million would be required to submit annual reports on procurement goals and spending on contracts with female-owned, minority-owned, veteran-owned companies and small businesses.

Annual reports would need to outline a buying plan for specific goods and services the company plans to

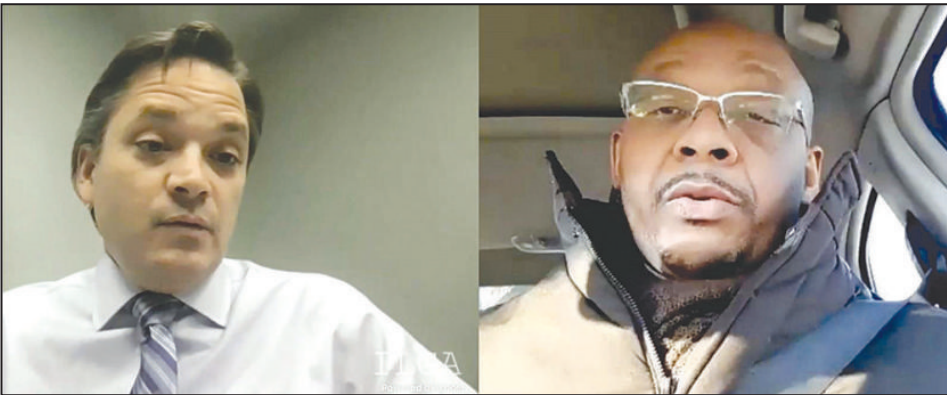
procure in the next six to 18 months, include any procurement codes used by the company. It’s an effort to assist entrepreneurs and diverse companies in understanding upcoming opportunities with the company submitting the buying plan, according to the bill.

“Part of our effort, as we have done in many other sectors, is to start by trying to ask those individuals that are doing it, to supply reports, to fill out reports and show us what they are doing relative to diversity, and not only what their numbers look like but also, in some cases, the plan to increase that diversity over time,” Davis said.

Businesses that make less than \$15 million a year would possibly be exempt from filling out diversity reports but would still have the opportunity to do so if they desired.

Dan Johnson, a lobbyist representing the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association, said the idea of these reports is to act as a bridge between large buying institutions and minority-owned, female-owned and veteran-owned businesses.

Reports would be found on the Illinois Commerce Commission’s website under supplier diversity, which makes it easier



Dan Johnson, left, a lobbyist representing the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association, and Rep. William Davis, D- Hazel East Crest, discuss how House Bill 4217 would increase diversity in wind and solar jobs during a virtual hearing. (Credit: ilga.gov)

for utility companies to look up and get in touch with the desired businesses.

Since renewable energy focuses more on the maintenance of wind and solar farms, Johnson noted that the law had yet to contemplate the reality of renewable energy businesses and suppliers when building these farms. Language in HB 4217 would align standards with the Clean Energy Jobs Act, he said.

“In a way, we’re sort of trying to catch up to the workforce diversity

that was in the (CEJA package) to say let’s catch up on the supplier diversity piece of it as well,” Johnson said.

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# Kaskaskia’s Workforce Equity Initiative opens student opportunities

Kaskaskia College’s Workforce Equity Initiative continues to help minority students excel and complete their certificates in 10 different programs with the Serving with An Equity Lens (SEALs) program.

To date, the program has benefited more than 50 students, with 11 students have already completed the program and gained employment. Twenty-one students completed their certificate programs at the end of the fall semester. The college has been awarded \$599,539 to continue the grant for a second year and plans on adding three additional certificate options, including culinary, emergency medical technician, and industrial technology.

The SEALs program provides African Americans and other minorities living in the KC district with the resources they need to compete in today’s world, all completely free.

“WEI gave me an opportunity, a chance for something,” said SEALs participant Christopher Boyd. “It is truly amazing. Honestly, I would have been happy making anywhere between \$20 to \$25 an hour as a professional truck driver, but starting here at Martin Brower as a yard jockey, I’m already

making \$23 an hour and I work over 40 hours a week. This place has great insurance and in six months I’ll get to graduate to an actual driver and then my pay will greatly increase. I make in one week more than what I did in a two-week period working for Walmart. Acquiring my CDL really has changed my life and I am truly grateful and blessed for what has come my way.”

In August 2021, Boyd completed his truck driving certificate (CDL) and started working with Martin-Brower in Lebanon shortly after.

The program is designed to help students get trained and job-ready in less than a year with benefits such as:

- Free tuition, books, and course fees.
- Free childcare and transportation for those who need it.
- Free advising and job placement support.
- Free academic and training assistance.
- Free training in critical “soft” skills valued by employers, plus a stipend for every student who successfully completes the training.

In addition to the three newly added certificate programs, students

can choose to participate in the following KC programs: welding, carpentry, network security administration, automotive technology, certified nursing assisting, truck driving training, and heating/venting and air conditioning.

A goal of the WEI program is to place students in full-time jobs to earn at least 30 percent above the regional living wage. The overall goal is to accelerate the time for the participating minority population to enter and succeed in post-secondary education/training programs that lead to employment in high-skilled, high-wage, and in-demand occupations.

“Sometimes the environment doesn’t allow us to reach out to or to know what resources are available or we don’t know how to reach out for the opportunity, said SEALs participant Dwayne Dardon. “We feel discouragement from past experiences with people who say they are trying to help us.” In August 2021, Dardon completed his truck driving

certificate and started working with a local trucking company in September.

“I wouldn’t be here without this grant right now,” said SEALs participant Jessie Jackson. “It helped me get into college and pursue my interest in automotive, plus gain experience while I’m finishing my classes.”

KC also offers participants several wrap-around services to increase their success in the program including an advisor/coach who will walk students through all steps of attending college from enrolling to graduating. Free tutoring is always available to any student having trouble in a course, plus the college offers KC students free access to Talkspace. This online therapy service connects users to a dedicated, licensed therapist via text messaging or live video.

For more information or questions, contact WEI Recruiter, Bunny Garrett at (618) 545-3122 or WEI Coach/Advisor Charlee George at (618) 545-3132.

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**Valroy Binsbacher**  
Attorney  
vbinsbacher@bdhlawllc.com

**Kevin Dawson**  
Attorney  
kdawson@bdhlawllc.com

**Dean Henke**  
Attorney  
dhenke@bdhlawllc.com

**B | C | P | K**

**BYRON CARLSON PETRI & KALB, LLC**  
attorneys at law

Commercial Litigation, Personal Injury, Estate Planning,  
Mechanic’s Liens, Wrongful Death, Probate Matters  
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& Criminal

CHRISTOPHER BYRON - ERIC CARLSON - CHRISTOPHER PETRI  
BRIAN KALB - JILLIAN CLARK - JOSEPH HARVATH - ERIN KENNEDY  
Of Counsel - MEREDITH EICHHOLZ

618-655-0600 800-338-3352 [bcpklaw.com](http://bcpklaw.com)