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OAAI Wins Permit Deadline and Vegetation Cutting Zone in New Law

SPRINGFIELD, IL: Legislation is on its way to the Illinois Governor's desk that codifies rules under which billboard companies may legally clear vegetation obstructing signage in Illinois. House Bill 5463 passed both chambers unanimously in the Illinois General Assembly this week after being amended by the Outdoor Advertising Association of Illinois (OAAI) from its initial introduction to give all Illinois billboard companies firm "rules of the road" on how much vegetation may be cut. The legislation requires the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to comply with a specific set of guidelines.



"While IDOT had internal rules guiding their permit and vegetation control process, Illinois statute was actually silent on the matter," says Rose Trader, executive director for the OAAI. "We had members who were not receiving vegetation-cutting permits in a timely manner or were being denied permits when they felt they had a right to one. This legislation establishes a timeline in law by which IDOT must grant permits and sets an area where obstructions on the right of way can be removed."

The legislation will now require IDOT to process vegetation control permits throughout Illinois within 45 days. It also establishes "cutting or trimming of vegetation to clear a visibility zone 250 feet in front of a single-sided sign and 250 feet in front of each side of a double-sided sign." Furthermore, "the visibility zone for signs shall also include an additional 250-foot triangular section measured diagonally from the edge of the right-of-way to the edge of pavement" allowing for up to 1000 feet of cutting area in a right of way zone for a double-sided billboard.

Todd Sanders, president of the OAAI states "I think this effort was of critical importance to our members in that it finally clarified for everyone what can be cut and mandates a processing time for issuing permits. Companies can now rely on firm answers from IDOT in order to plan their vegetation control activities. It will save time and money in the long run." He also stated that he feels this effort put OAAI "on the board" as an entity that is willing to work and negotiate fair outcomes for the industry as a whole.

The legislation was championed with the input of OAAI board members as well as the hiring of a lobbyist to represent the association's interests. The success of the effort gave hope that future efforts to improve industry regulations will take shape in the coming months.

HB 5463 was signed into law on June 6 by Governor J.B. Pritzker.