

TALKING POINTS: PROTECT CIVIL RIGHTS IN IOWA

IN OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED LEGISLATION: SF2385 / HF2574

This bill passed the Iowa Senate and will be considered by the Iowa House of Representatives on Monday April 15, 2024

- My name is *(name and city)*, I am with *(organization)* I am contacting you today to protect civil rights in Iowa and express our strong opposition to SF2385/HF2574 (with amendments) insofar as that bill would make substantial changes in the Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965, of the Iowa Code, particularly in the provisions concerning the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and the Human Rights Commissions. We urge you and other members of the General Assembly to vote NO on this bill.
- The president of the Iowa NAACP calls this bill a “Dangerous blow to civil rights in Iowa”. I believe it is dangerous too because... *(tell your story.)*
- The Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965 prohibits unlawful discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin, among other bases, in employment, education, credit, public accommodations, and housing. The beneficiaries of the Iowa Civil Rights Act are members of minority groups.
- The Civil Rights Act clearly gives Commissioners authority to “investigate and study the existence, character, causes, and extent of discrimination . . . and to attempt the elimination of such discrimination by education and conciliation.” And in past years the Commission has held hearings in different locations within the State for just that purpose. The Commission’s authority also includes “making recommendations to the general assembly for such further legislation concerning (unlawful) discrimination . . . as it may deem necessary and desirable.” The Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965 also gives the Commission, not the Executive Director, the authority to adopt, amend and rescind rules to implement the purposes of the Iowa Civil Rights Act.
- This bill would dramatically change the nature of the Commission and the authority structure of the Act. Whereas the Iowa Civil Rights Act vests authority in a diverse group of seven Commissioners, SF2385 would lodge authority in a single person, who necessarily would undercut entirely the geographic and other diversity of the Commission. SF2385 would strip the Commissioners of all authority under the Act and convert the Commissioners into “advisors” to the Director. If passed SF2385, the Commission would not have the authority to make recommendations to the General Assembly for “further legislation” or bring matters of policy to the Legislature’s attention, but only “to make policy recommendations *to the director for consideration* to be incorporated with any recommendations from the agency to the governor and general assembly.” It would be the Director, *not* the body of seven Commissioners drawn from across the State, who would have that authority. The Commission’s authority with respect to rules would be reduced to “procedures as necessary for *the conduct of commission meetings.*” In short, members of the Commission essentially become advisors to the Director.
- I have serious concerns about the involvement of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission's current Director in crafting this portion of the legislation and denying the Commissioners the opportunity to review and discuss the legislation before she submitted it to the Governor’s office and the Legislature. This is no way for change to evolve, especially as it entailed *zero input* not only from Commissioners but from those groups for whose benefit the Iowa Civil Rights Act was written. *Tellingly, given the chance to express themselves about SF2385, the Commission voted 6-0 to oppose it.*
- I also strongly oppose the proposal to eliminate separate Commissions dedicated to addressing the status of various minority groups: Commission on the Status of African Americans; Commission of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs; Commission of Native American Affairs; Commission of Persons with Disabilities; Commission of Latino Affairs; and Commission on the Status of Women. Consolidating these groups under a smaller Human Rights Board with only one representative per community and then having only one representative for that entire board is a disrespectful idea.
- It is crucial to recognize the importance of creating dedicated spaces for different ethnic groups to voice their perspectives within the state government. Each community has unique needs and priorities, and limiting their input to just one representative overlooks the diversity of viewpoints within these cultures. This approach would diminish the opportunity for our government to fully understand and address the distinct concerns of each community.
- Furthermore, such a consolidation would mute many diverse voices and dilute the current need for focus and historic depth and breadth of these cultural groups' well-being in Iowa and specifically government proceedings.
- So again, I ask that you protect civil rights in Iowa and vote NO on this bill or, at the very least, strike those portions of the bill making changes to these important Commissions’ structure, composition, and operations.
- Will you vote NO? (wait for an answer) Thank you very much for your time please protect civil rights in Iowa.