

Department of Human Rights (DHR) Proposals for the 2010 Iowa General Assembly

1. **Strategic reorganization of the Department of Human Rights.** The current structure as an umbrella agency with nine divisions has created a silo effect on staffing and funding for services and advocacy for Iowa's under-represented and underserved populations. The proposed reorganization increases efficiency and effectiveness by providing better oversight, reducing resources expended on administration, and encouraging stronger collaboration to achieve mutual goals. Without additional FTEs or funding, the new department structure will support the flexibility and accountability to develop opportunities for underrepresented Iowans, bring about positive systemic changes to expand human rights, and continuous improvement of our customer service.
2. **Study and plan for action on the problem of the minority achievement gap in Iowa's education system.** Intentional focus for the last few years on Iowa's disproportionate contact of minority youth with the juvenile justice system has resulted in a significant reduction in minority detention. Research shows that academic struggles are highly correlated with dropping out of school, contact with justice system, low wage employment and unemployment. DHR is requesting a legislative interim study committee to review minority achievement gap data, engage stakeholders in suggesting policy solutions and community best practices, and develop long-term plans and accountability for implementation of activities to improve academic performance for Iowa's minority youth.
3. **Update Iowa's protections of rights for persons with disabilities.** Code 216C provides protections for Iowans with physical disabilities, but predates both the Americans with Disabilities Act and mental health parity. Provisions of the Code protect some disabilities while not others, and create more restrictions on persons with disabilities than the federal law allows. 2010 is the 20th anniversary year of the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Iowa law should be in compliance with that landmark legislation.
4. **Require employers to provide a reasonable accommodation for employees who breastfeed to express milk during their regular unpaid break times.** While most employers already provide such an accommodation, some do not, or they require the employee to express milk in a toilet stall. Iowa has one of the nation's highest rates of mothers in the workforce. Research shows less than half of Iowa women who initiated breastfeeding at their child's birth are still doing so when the infant is six months old, which has been shown to increase business costs through higher rates of illness and absenteeism. The bill defines a reasonable accommodation and provides for education and technical assistance for employers who request it.
5. **Adopt a Deaf Children's Bill of Rights.** Eleven other states have adopted such a statement of support for educational policies and practices that flexibly meet the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing children, whose academic performance has been shown to decline over time. In Iowa, an average of 33% of students who are deaf or hard of hearing test "proficient" in reading and 40.5% test "proficient" in math. A Deaf Children's Bill of Rights mirrors the existing federal IDEA legislation; no additional funds are required to implement since states are already obligated to follow the IDEA.



Chester J. Culver, Governor
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6. **Study the concept of creating a state Paid Leave Insurance program.** Because of Iowa's aging population, more workers than ever before will be forced to take time out of the workforce to care for an ailing family member. The majority of family caregiving time is unpaid, creating a financial hardship on the caregiver, and increasing health care costs if potential caregivers cannot afford to take the time. Further, half of all births in Iowa are to a single mother, many of whom cannot be without an income for more than a couple of weeks. DHR requests that the Legislature convene an interim study committee to review possible models from other states that would provide at no cost to the employer some portion of a caregiver's income if certain criteria were met for paid leave.