

Iowa
Commission
on the
Status
of Women

Department of Human Rights
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*Making a difference in
the lives of Iowa women*

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Mission

The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women (ICSW) is a state agency that seeks to assure equality for Iowa women. Women continue to have special needs in such areas as employment, education, child support, health care, dependent care, insurance, credit, violence, and legal rights. The Commission advocates for Iowa women, working to equalize women's opportunities and to promote full participation by women in the economic, political, and social life of the state.

Composition

Established in 1972 by the Iowa Legislature, the Commission is now a division of the Department of Human Rights. The Commission is composed of nine citizens appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Iowa Senate. Two members of the Iowa Senate, two members of the Iowa House of Representatives, and the director of the Department of Human Rights serve *ex officio*.

The Commission meets at least six times each year and makes an annual report of its activities and priorities to the Governor and to the Legislature. An administrator, two other staff members, and interns implement the program and policies set by the Commission.

Family

The Commission represents the interests of women, particularly homemakers, in Social Security, pension laws and regulations, insurance, divorce, domestic violence, and credit. It supports services to assist displaced homemakers, as well as other social service programs, which allow families to remain intact despite economic or emotional crisis.

Commission on the Status of Women

Legislation

The ICSW is a responsive and visible advocacy agency for Iowa women's needs and provides a basis for statewide study and action on issues affecting women. Through research, education, legislative action and special projects, the Commission is a strong voice for women's rights.

The Commission annually researches and submits a program of priorities to the Governor and the General Assembly. The Commission advocates women's interests on the federal level, testifies on behalf of women at legislative hearings, and monitors pending legislation for its impact on women.

The ICSW supports reforms, including revision of state rape laws to protect victims' rights; mandatory arrest for perpetrators of domestic violence; reform of the Iowa inheritance and divorce laws to recognize homemaker's contributions; passage of state requirements to eliminate sexism in education; amending the Constitution to include women; pay equity; and revision of the Iowa Code to eliminate unequal treatment of persons based on sex.

In Iowa...

- 83% of girls have experienced sexual harassment in school
- 45.1% of all female-headed households with children under age 18 live in poverty
- women earn 68 cents to every dollar earned by men
- reported domestic abuse assault cases doubled between the years of 1991 and 1994
- women comprise 21% of the state legislature

Employment Project

The Employment Project has information available on a range of issues, including development of small businesses, pay equity, work and family, job listings, resume and career exploration assistance, and job rights.

A special project was the development of a video exploring nontraditional job opportunities for women. In 1996, The Volunteer Mentor Project was transferred from the ICSW to the newly created Iowa Workforce Development agency.

Appointments

The Commission worked to equalize women's participation in policy making positions long before 1987 when gender balance on state boards and commissions was required by law. Anyone interested in serving may complete a simple form. These are retained on file at the Commission office and copies are forwarded to the Governor's office.

Women's History Month

The Commission promotes the observance of March as Women's History Month, including the "Write Women Back Into History" Essay Contest. Stories of women, ordinary and extraordinary, are told by sixth to ninth grade students who write and submit essays each March.

Iowa Women's Hall of Fame

Few people are aware of the extent of women's contributions to society, whether past or present. To highlight women's heritage and recognize their contributions, the ICSW established the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1975. Each year, the Commission and the Governor induct four women into the Hall of Fame, paying tribute to them and setting them forth as role models for others.

Equality and Justice

Established in 1982 in honor of Cristine Wilson, the Cristine Wilson Medal for Equality and Justice is given to individuals whose lives and work have illustrated outstanding dedication and service on behalf of the ideals of equality and justice.

Information

The Commission office is a resource center for information, and reference materials are available for in-office use by the public.

Staff respond to hundreds of informational requests on topics such as employment, nontraditional occupations, sexual harassment, education, legal rights, divorce, welfare, insurance, domestic violence, sexual assault, pending legislation, and housing.

The Commission serves as a clearinghouse for information on women's programs and services, including a bimonthly newsletter distributed statewide. It also assists individuals in resolving issues of sex discrimination by referring them to the appropriate enforcement agency.

The statewide advocacy directory provides a computerized, accessible guide to networks on women's issues. Additional persons and organizations are identified on a regular basis, and printouts by category are available upon request.

Commissioners and staff speak to groups across the state and assist groups to identify qualified speakers on numerous women's issues. The Commission sponsors public forums and conferences on women's issues of current interest and distributes publications outlining women's issues in specific areas.

Revised November of 1996

Publications

- Advocacy Directories, including Iowa Women Organizations Listing
- Annual Report
- Credit Card Rights
- Divorce: Things to Consider (revised 1992)
- How to Get Your Bearings:
How to Get a Job (revised 1990)
- Referral Information on Programs to Assist Women/Minorities in Establishing and Expanding Small Businesses (revised 1996)
- Iowa Women's Hall of Fame Book
- Iowa Women and the Law (revised 1993)
- Iowa Women and the Law in Spanish
- IoWoman (bimonthly newsletter)
- Nontraditional Jobs for Women
- Sexism in Education
- Sexual Harassment: It's Against the Law (Education, Housing, and Workplace)
- Status of Iowa Women Report (1996)

Videotapes are also available for viewing on a variety of topics, including women's history, women and nontraditional careers, and sexual harassment in education.

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