

2009 Policy Agenda

1. Enhance protections for equal pay.
2. Provide sustainable funding for domestic violence and sexual assault centers across the state.
3. Extend gender balance requirement on boards and commissions to political subdivisions of the state.
4. Support policy and research to assist low-income women entering skill shortage areas.

Enhance protections for equal pay.

Current equal pay protections have been threatened by the 2007 Ledbetter decision of the US Supreme Court, which found that a person filing a pay discrimination complaint was entitled to no redress if they file more than 180 days after the discriminatory action, even if it was not discovered until years later. Because many private employers have policies against discussing wages, this creates an unfair advantage for employers who discriminate. Iowa ranks 37th among all states for gender wage equity. On average, Iowa women earn 62% of what men in their same industry earn.

ICSW has pre-filed a bill that would amend the Iowa Civil Rights Code to explicitly make it illegal to discriminate in pay based on gender, race, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation; clarify the discovery rule for cause of action; enhance penalties for discrimination; and emphasize current protections against retaliation. Basic assurance of equal pay for equal work is the bedrock of all other efforts to increase wage equity.

Provide sustainable funding for domestic violence and sexual assault centers across the state.

Victim services for domestic violence and sexual assault in Iowa have suffered from successive cuts and unreliable funding sources at the federal and state levels. Without a state appropriation of \$4 million, critical victim services, such as child advocacy, will be available to fewer Iowans. Additionally, centers will be forced to lengthen waiting lists to assist victims, and those in rural areas will face a greater likelihood of closing their doors. In some parts of the state, victims must already travel across up to five counties to access services. Local prevention and victim services are a crucial part of Iowa's infrastructure. Iowa must make a commitment to fund services, and not leave victims (22,317 served in FY07) with nowhere to turn.

Extend gender balance requirement on boards and commissions to political subdivisions of the state.

Iowa already benefits from gender balance in all statewide Board and Commission memberships. Local communities would benefit by ensuring women and men have equal opportunities to effect local decision making by extending that requirement to political subdivisions. A review of Iowa's locally appointed boards and commissions, especially those with economic influence, would now find that most are not gender balanced.

Cities and counties can on their own adopt gender balance as a local priority, but hardly any have done so. Fewer women serving on local boards and commissions (outside of "traditionally female" areas, like libraries) means fewer women have opportunities to raise their public profiles or to build public management skills, such as budget administration. Communities miss out on developing new leaders, and women are less likely to enter the "leadership pipeline" to prepare for holding higher office. Research tells us that women tend to serve or run for office when they are asked to, rather than step forward uninvited. With women in Iowa having higher educational attainment than men overall, seeking higher numbers of women for boards and commissions may be the best way to attract qualified candidates.

Support policy and research to assist low-income women entering skill shortage areas.

Iowa faces a significant skill shortage, based more on lack of specific skills than on decreasing population. Women currently make up less than 25% of workers in identified skill shortage industries, and that includes large numbers in administrative support positions. Current efforts to recruit women into the state's high-wage, high-growth careers are minimal; in fact, women now make up less than 3% of Iowa's registered apprentices. Specific efforts are needed to assist women, specifically low-income women, in entering fields like advanced manufacturing, information technology, and building trades.

The ICSW is requesting an appropriation of \$19,000 above the agency's FY09 appropriation to match existing agency funds for a \$50,000 pilot project aimed at developing best practices/interventions for successfully training and placing low-income women in skill shortage areas. Examples of interventions might include short-term certificate programs, mentoring, or cohort programs aimed at quickly preparing women for careers and developing skills to address the isolation that women may feel as they "integrate" a workplace. A single \$50,000 grant would be awarded to an existing provider of integrated workforce/education services, based upon a large regional wage disparity, and the proposed intervention and intended results. Innovative policy making to connect low income women with high-wage, high-demand jobs is a wise investment of state dollars in tough economic times.



iowa commission on the status of women

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