

## Boards and Commissions Review Committee

We are co-presidents of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Cedar Falls-Waterloo, an affiliate of the nonpartisan national AAUW. AAUW members work to advance equity for women and girls. AAUW Iowa and AAUW members across the state worked for passage of the gender balance laws. We oppose the committee's August 29 *"Recommendation 5: Allow the most qualified Iowans to serve on boards and commissions by repealing the arbitrary gender-balance requirement."*

We support the gender balance law because the law works, it does not prevent anyone from serving, and the law provides for good government through representation that is reflective of the population.

Iowa led the way among U.S. states when it **required** gender balance on appointed state boards and commissions. Data show that since bipartisan passage in April 1987, Republican and Democrat Iowa governors and state senators have honored the law and maintained gender balance on appointed state boards and commissions.

The 2009 law, also passed with bipartisan support, effectively only **recommends** gender balance for appointed municipal and county boards and commissions. It contained a provision for "good faith effort" to attain balance, with no accompanying consequences, resulting in weaker compliance. However, as of 2022, an average 61% of county boards and commissions were gender balanced. Of the 67 cities reporting data, 62% said their boards and commissions were gender balanced. This is an improvement over the status in 2009, when fewer than 20% of city and county boards and commissions were gender balanced. (Catt Center, ISU data)

Secondly, claims that the law makes it hard to appoint "the best, most qualified" are not supported by fact and often are meant to imply that women are not as competent or qualified as men. Levels of educational and professional attainment, as well as community engagement of women, disqualify that argument. Some boards and commissions have requirements (e.g. political party, military veteran, specific profession) that applicants must meet while others have none; accordingly, not everyone is "qualified" for appointment. We know of no good reason to eliminate either a requirement or recommendation for gender balance. It's true that sometimes an applicant may need to wait for an opening to arise, but delay is not the same as denial.

If the number of state boards and commissions is decreased by over 100 as proposed, there will be significantly fewer potential state appointees to find, weakening the argument that it's too difficult to fill positions. Fewer appointees would lighten that task.

It's hard for organizations, community groups and even government to find volunteers and leaders willing to give of their time, but it's not impossible. That was true years ago when

gender balance laws were passed and it's true today. We know Iowans are capable of doing hard things, including balancing gender representation.

Lastly, the proposal to eliminate the gender balance law is contrary to good public policy. Tired old arguments that gender balance is a "quota system" and "social engineering" and no longer needed because the "gender imbalance has been corrected" are not persuasive. Just look at the make-up of our Legislature or Congress or corporate suites and you see that is not the case. Government is supposed to work for all the people, not just some. It's beneficial to have provisions that ensure that boards and commissions are diverse and provide for a variety of perspectives, viewpoints, and life experiences. The current gender balance law provides for at least one type of diversity and we should not do away with that.

According to the Governor's June 23 press release, "The Boards and Commissions Review Committee, created in the Governor's alignment bill, is responsible for reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of all boards, commissions, and other similar entities created in Iowa law and making recommendations for the continuation, elimination, consolidation, or reorganization of those boards and commissions as needed." To propose eliminating Iowa's long-standing and exemplary gender balance law without providing any sort of evidence to support the recommendation is quite a leap as relates to "reviewing efficiency and effectiveness." We're unaware of data presented to the public that the law in any way interferes with the "efficiency and effectiveness" of boards and commissions. In fact, Recommendation 5 can be read to conflict with the committee's *"Finding 3: Iowa should strive for better public participation in its boards and commissions process."* when it takes away one of the successful avenues for expanded participation. There is not even a tenuous relationship between Recommendation 5 and the committee's other charge of recommending "continuation, elimination, consolidation, or reorganization" of boards and commissions.

We'll conclude with part of a statement Maureen made to the subcommittee for SSB 1037 (repeal gender balance requirements), introduced this past legislative session, but which did not advance. "Laws reflect our values. Ask yourselves, is . . . repealing all gender balance requirements in the public interest and does it build a better and more fair government? Or does it tell half our population that we don't care whether they have a seat at the table?" Don't move Iowa backward—reject and remove Recommendation 5.

Thank you for your consideration of our viewpoint.

Maureen White & Louise Conklin, co-president AAUW Cedar Falls-Waterloo