



Iowa Office of Civil Rights



**Annual
Report
FY 2024**

OUR MISSION

TO PROVIDE IMPARTIAL,
EFFICIENT, AND FACT-DRIVEN
INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSES OF
DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS
FILED IN IOWA AND PROMOTE
CIVIL RIGHTS OUTREACH AND
EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES
THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

OUR VISION

THE IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL
RIGHTS IS DEDICATED TO
UPHOLDING JUSTICE
THROUGHOUT THE CIVIL RIGHTS
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS.

CORE VALUES AND FOCUS

IMPARTIAL - WE WILL PROVIDE NEUTRAL,
FACT-DRIVEN INVESTIGATIONS TO ENSURE
IOWANS ARE TREATED JUSTLY UNDER THE LAW

EFFICIENT - WE WILL WORK TO ENSURE
TAXPAYER DOLLARS ARE UTILIZED TO THEIR
FULLEST EXTENT

PURPOSEFUL WORK ETHIC - WE
NURTURE A CULTURE OF OUTSTANDING WORK
ETHIC, TEAMWORK, AND DILIGENCE

CUSTOMER SERVICE FOCUS - WE
ARE COURTEOUS, RESPONSIVE, AND
RESPECTFUL

TRUSTED RESOURCE - WE ARE A
RELIABLE CIVIL RIGHTS RESOURCE FOR
IOWANS

MISSION ORIENTED - WE WILL KEEP A
CONSTANT FOCUS ON ENSURING JUST
OUTCOMES FOR IOWANS

KEY STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

REDUCING EMPLOYMENT+ INVESTIGATION TIMELINE

- Utilize federal fiscal resources to hire and train part-time interviewers to further reduce complaint processing times
- Analyze team data to support process improvements and eliminate unnecessary waste
- Assess team caseloads to assign senior staff to complex legal and fact analyses of civil rights complaints

IMPROVING THE CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT PROCESS

- Identify opportunities to streamline processes to provide timely investigative analyses to IOWANS
- Complete transition to move IOCR to new case management system
- Assess paper process to optimize digital platforms

PREVENTION EDUCATION

- Identify partnerships with key employment and housing entities for supportive education and outreach opportunities
- Promote civil rights compliance advice hotline for small businesses
- Increase civil rights education and training opportunities throughout the state

DATA DRIVEN OUTCOMES

- Identify improvement opportunities for data integrity through implementation of new case management system
- Promote improvements on investigative processes identified through data
- Increase awareness of productivity opportunities to improve timelines



THE REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024 SUMMARIZES IOCR'S MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AS WELL AS OUR VISION, CORE VALUES, AND OBJECTIVE FOR THE COMING YEARS. FY24 BROUGHT CONTINUED PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES."

– KRISTEN STIFFLER, DIRECTOR



MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KRISTEN STIFFLER

The Iowa Office of Civil Rights (IOCR) continues to enforce Iowa's Civil Rights Act of 1965 by investigating allegations of illegal discrimination and providing education and outreach opportunities throughout the state. Beginning in July 2024, the Iowa Civil Rights Commission will be based within the Iowa Office of Civil Rights.

Another successful year was completed with over 1,400 complaints investigated by agency staff. Both the Employment+ and Housing Programs have initiated process improvements to complete investigations of aging complaints. Agency staff completed 17 high-quality educational programs and outreach events; reaching over 3,000 Iowans.

This report covers agency results from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024. This report includes descriptions of the civil rights proceedings, investigations, hearings conducted, outcomes of hearings, and decisions rendered. Also contained within this report is data on the function of the agency and processing of complaints.

The agency will be working to improve accessibility for Iowans who interact with the IOCR. The two investigative units (Employment+ and Housing) will further work to complete investigations of aging complaints and improve timeliness.

Iowa's Office of Civil Rights is a small state agency (27 full-time employees and a budget under \$3 million). The IOCR's success would not be possible without the support of the dedicated employees of the agency, the Commissioners, and those we serve. It has truly been an honor to serve as the Director for the Iowa Office of Civil Rights, and I humbly present the FY24 Annual Report in accordance with Iowa Code section 216.5(7).

Warm regards,

Kristen Stiffler, Director

IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission is created under Iowa Code section 216.3 and is comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor and subject to confirmation by the Iowa Senate. The seven commissioners have rulemaking authority under the Iowa Civil Rights Act and also sits as the final decision-makers on contested case proceedings brought by the Agency.

*SF2355 has changed the powers and duties of the Commission and reduces the Commission appointments from seven to five members, and also continues to have the Commission as the final decision-makers on contested cases brought by the IOCR.



MARCELENA ORDAZ
CHAIRPERSON, ELDRIDGE, IA

Marcelena Ordaz began her first term on the Iowa Civil Rights Commission on May 1, 2017. She

was reappointed to a second term by Governor Kim Reynolds that began May 1, 2021. Commissioner Ordaz is an executive director for a non-profit that supports women-owned businesses. She enjoys serving on the Commission to ensure Iowa can continue to be a desired state to live in by protecting the rights of all citizens. Commissioner Ordaz's current term ends on April 30, 2025.



HOLLY WHITE
VICE CHAIRPERSON, POLK CITY, IA

Holly White began her term on the Iowa Civil Rights Commission on May 1, 2021. Commissioner White came to

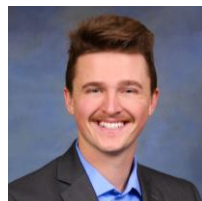
serve on the Commission because she felt called to protect Iowans' fundamental civil rights, civil liberties, and opportunities. She currently works as a technology consultant. Commissioner White's current term ends on April 30, 2025.



DONALD DEKOCK
COMMISSIONER, PELLA, IA

Donald DeKock was appointed on May 1, 2023, to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. Commissioner DeKock is a veteran of the United States Navy and a retired law enforcement officer.

He decided to serve on the Commission because he believes that everyone should be treated in a fair and respectful manner. Commissioner DeKock's current term ends on April 30, 2027.



DANIEL KENNEDY
COMMISSIONER, WEST DES MOINES, IA

Daniel Kennedy was appointed on May 1, 2023. Commissioner Kennedy is a technical accountant at

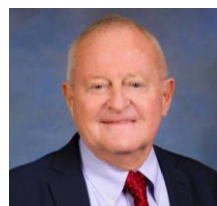
Sammons Financial Group. Commissioner Kennedy joined the Commission to make a positive impact on the state that he grew up in and where his daughter is growing up. Commissioner Kennedy's current term ends on April 30, 2027.



SAM KOOIKER
COMMISSIONER, SHELDON, IA

Sam Kooiker began his first term on the Iowa Civil Rights Commission on May 1, 2017. He was reappointed to a

second term by Governor Kim Reynolds that began May 1, 2021. Commissioner Kooiker is the City Manager in Sheldon. He was born with cerebral palsy and has a special civil rights interest in disability and race-based discrimination. Commissioner Kooiker's current term ends on April 30, 2025.



DENNIS MANDSAGER
COMMISSIONER, CLIVE, IA

Dennis Mandsager was appointed on May 1, 2021. Commissioner Mandsager is a retired U.S. Navy

Surface Warfare Officer and Judge Advocate. Commissioner Mandsager's current term ends on April 30, 2025.

IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS – FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT



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THE AGENCY CONTRACTS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF ILLEGAL DISCRIMINATION. THESE DOLLARS, ALONG WITH THE GENERAL FUND APPROPRIATION, ALLOWED FOR AGENCY STAFF TO COMPLETE OVER 1,400 INVESTIGATIONS IN FY24.”

– DIRECTOR STIFFLER ON FISCAL YEAR APPROPRIATIONS

FISCAL OUTLOOK

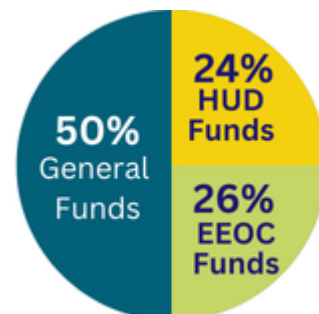
The IOCR receives 50% of its operating budget from the General Fund and 50% from the Federal Government for the agency's 27 FTEs. Due to joint jurisdiction between the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the IOCR is able to contract for complaint investigations to support operating expenses. The EEOC and HUD annual contract dollar amounts change from year to year and are based on federal appropriations to those agencies, as well as the number of completed investigations by IOCR. IOCR's FY24 revenue and appropriation were \$2,675,989.

Over the last 10 years, IOCR's General Fund appropriation has remained relatively stable, allowing the agency the opportunity to identify efficiencies within the current investigative process.

In FY24, the IOCR completed 815 joint employment investigations resulting in \$676,450. The IOCR completed 184 joint housing investigations resulting in \$584,478.

HUD also offers opportunities to receive partnership funds which are used to support the education and outreach activities by agency staff.

<u>\$2,675,989 TOTAL</u>	
STATE FUNDS	FEDERAL FUNDS
\$1,337,999	\$1,337,990



REGULATORY COMPLIANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

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THIS YEAR WAS ABOUT CONTINUING PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS FOR OUR TEAM TO ENSURE STATUTORY AND FEDERAL CONTRACT COMPLIANCE. THESE IMPROVED PROCESSES WILL HELP IOWANS RECEIVE TIMELY NOTIFICATIONS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS PROCESS.”

– KAITLIN SMITH, REGULATORY COMPLIANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS MANAGER



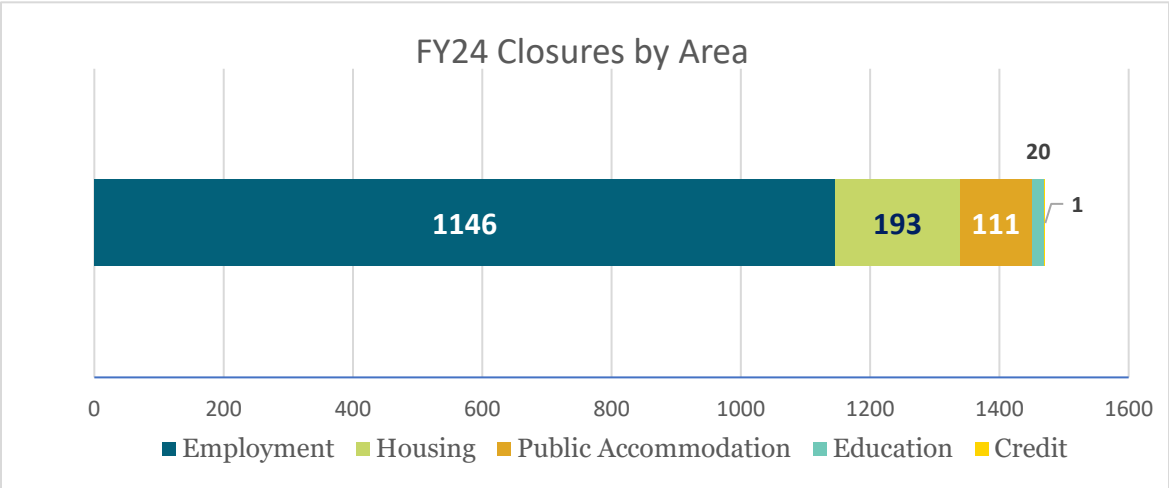
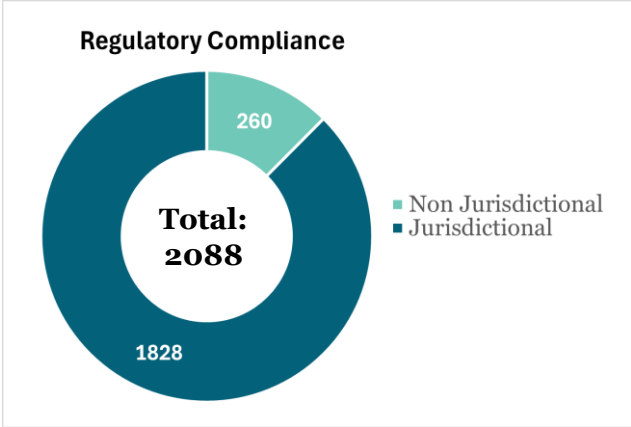
TEAM PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Regulatory Compliance and Administrative Process Team is to assist Iowans at the initial stage of the civil rights complaint process and provide answers to questions throughout the administrative civil rights process. The team ensures all operations comply with state and federal laws and regulations and ensure federal contract provisions are met.

In FY24, the IOCR received over 2,000 alleged illegal discrimination inquiries, which is an increase of 26% since FY21. Over 250 inquiries were determined to be non-jurisdictional or not timely filed. The Administrative Process Team also completed 163 administrative releases (issuance of a “Right-to-Sue Letter”), allowing complainants to file a lawsuit in district court.

Executive Order 10 went into effect on January 10, 2023, which requires a thorough review of state agencies’ administrative rules. These updated rules allow for the removal of unnecessary administrative burden on parties that appear before the Office. IAC Chapter 3 and Chapter 8 went into effect on September 25, 2024.

In FY24, the IOCR issued zero administrative closures for frivolous complaints pursuant to IAC 3.47(4).



EMPLOYMENT+ INVESTIGATIONS

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THE EMPLOYMENT+ TEAM INVESTIGATED OVER 1,150 TIER 1 INVESTIGATIONS AND 109 TIER 2 INVESTIGATIONS IN FY24. THE TEAM’S DEDICATION TO JUST AND FAIR OUTCOMES FOR IOWANS IS EVIDENT IN THEIR CONTINUED WORK ETHIC.”



– CHARLES HILL, LEGAL MANAGER – EMPLOYMENT+

TEAM PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

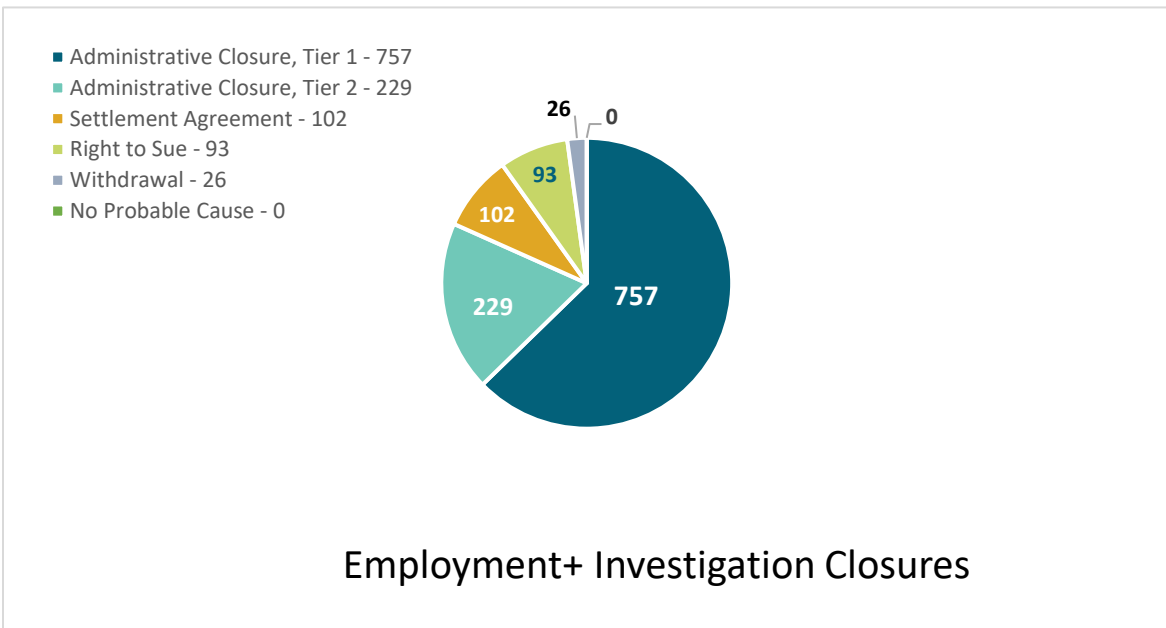
The Employment+ Team processes and investigates complaints under the Iowa Civil Rights Act and equivalent sections of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. The areas of investigation include employment, public accommodation, education, and credit.

For employment complaints that are jointly jurisdictional with the federal laws enforced by the EEOC, the IOCR enters into an annual workshare agreement to complete those investigations.

In FY24, Employment+ completed 1,150 Tier 1 investigations (the initial legal review of the complainant’s case to determine if additional investigation should be completed or if the file should be administratively closed because no future action is warranted). Over 100 Tier 2 investigations were completed on the files identified for additional investigation. This includes interviewing of witnesses and collection of additional documents and evidence.

Of the 109 Tier 2 investigations completed, 4 complaints were found to have probable cause that illegal discrimination occurred. Three complaints involved employment discrimination, and one complaint involved public accommodation.

The IOCR offers free mediation to parties, regardless of representation by an attorney. In FY24, the agency staff and volunteers completed 86 mediations.



FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT



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THE GOAL OF THE HOUSING TEAM WAS TO IDENTIFY CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLETE TIMELY HOUSING INVESTIGATIONS AND RESOLVE CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINTS THAT WERE TAKING OVER A YEAR TO INVESTIGATE.”

– DIRECTOR STIFFLER ON HOUSING TEAM PERFORMANCE

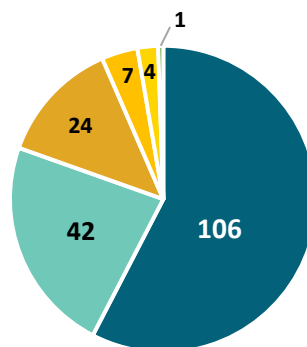
TEAM PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

The Housing Team processes and investigates complaints under the Iowa Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. The IOCR enters into an annual workshare agreement with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to complete investigations. In FY24, the Housing Team completed 184 investigations. Four of those investigations resulted in probable cause findings.

The IOCR settled 42 complaints through alternative dispute resolution resulting in public interest relief including fair housing training, policy review, and policy changes, as well as complainant-specific relief such as monetary damages and modified lease terms. The IOCR continues to monitor successfully conciliated cases for continued compliance with state and federal laws.

The Housing Team continues to provide free quarterly fair housing training to the public regarding fair housing laws.

- No Probable Cause - 106
- Settlements - 42
- Failure to Cooperate - 24
- Withdrawn - 7
- Probable Cause - 4
- Non Jurisdictional - 1



Housing Investigations FY24

IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS – LITIGATION

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THE IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS WORKS WITH PARTIES TO RESOLVE THEIR COMPLAINTS THROUGH ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE METHODS, AND WAS SUCCESSFUL IN MANY OF THOSE EFFORTS FOR THIS YEAR'S PROBABLE CAUSE CASES. HOWEVER, AS THE CASE MENTIONED BELOW AGAINST MCKILLIP MANAGEMENT SHOWS, IOCR CONTINUES TO PURSUE ITS IMPORTANT WORK IN DISTRICT COURT WHEN NEEDED.”



– KATIE FIALA, ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

NOTABLE LITIGATION HIGHLIGHTS

The IOCR referred eight cases for litigation following a probable cause finding by the agency. The IOCR engaged in successful settlement efforts to settle four of the eight cases before a trial or administrative hearing. For the remaining four cases, two remain pending and two were administratively closed following the IOCR's conciliation efforts with both parties.

In addition to receiving and resolving new probable cause cases, the IOCR's work on probable cause findings from previous years continued. As in a highlight, *In Iowa Civil Rights Commission and Van Gundy v. McKillip Management, LLC et al*, Polk County case number CVCV062568, the Commission proved the complainant had been sexually harassed and retaliated against by her landlord. The court found there was a clear implication that the complainant's landlord had asked her to exchange sexual favors to continue living in her apartment, and once it was clear the complainant was not interested in a sexual relationship, the landlord turned vindictive. Following trial, the district court judge awarded the complainant \$30,000, plus her private attorney's fees.

9 *Cases in Active Litigation*

4 *Cases Referred for Litigation*

\$30,000

Awarded to complainant

CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



NOTABLE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES FROM FY24

The IOCR continues to identify ways to reach Iowans to assist in a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities under the Iowa Civil Rights Act. Over 3,000 Iowans were reached through outreach efforts during the year.

The Housing Team provides free quarterly fair housing training specifically focused on compliance.

The IOCR staff attended 17 education and outreach events throughout the year and enjoyed meeting and educating Iowans on their civil rights and responsibilities.



Director Stiffler and Assistant Attorney General Katie Fiala hosted Jack Baumann at IOCR for job shadow week with the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council.



IOCR staff attending the HUD Fair Housing Training Academy where they learned about fair housing best practices that will help IOCR serve Iowans.



Iowa Office of Civil Rights

6200 Park Ave., Suite 100

Des Moines, IA 50321

Phone: 515-281-4121

icrc.iowa.gov

