LWVIA strongly opposes this bill (SSB 1037). Boards and commissions give stakeholders and regular Iowans a voice in the operations of state government. They incubate leaders, some of whom decide to run for office. It’s where many Iowans dip their toes in the water of public service. It is so important right now to hear the voices of women on these boards, and this could not come at a worse time.

Governor Reynolds has issued a moratorium on new rules, with a complete review of rules over the next four years. She has announced a major reorganization of state agencies. The voices of women on the boards and commissions that work with and in many cases approve these rules are absolutely needed. Making sure women are heard as agencies restructure is essential.

Gender balanced boards, as political and geographically balanced boards, bring diversity of ideas and experience. Women may raise issues of gender inequality that men may not have experienced.

And I’m going to push back about women’s advances.

* We can celebrate our achievements, but it did take Iowa far longer than other states to elect its first female Governor. But let’s level set.
* Women continue to face a wage gap that has not budged in the last two decades. In 2022, the wage gap narrowed by only one penny. Women working full-time, year-round now make only 84 cents for every dollar men earn ([according to the Women’s Law Center](https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/20/2022-in-gender-equality-politics-business-pay-gap.html)). If you are a Latina, that wage gaps 46 cents. That gap has long-lasting impacts, including on retirement ([retiring women have saved only 70% of men](https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/))
* Women reached 32% of the [S&P 500 board seats](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-21/women-reach-32-of-s-p-500-board-seats-for-the-first-time?leadSource=uverify%20wall) for the first time ever…..nowhere near equity. [Only 9% of Fortune 500 CEOs](https://www.wbcollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Women-CEOS-in-America_2022-0920221847.pdf) are women, and that’s an all-time high.
* And to put a value on this, a survey of [Chief investment officers of leading investment firms](https://global.beyondbullsandbears.com/2022/12/20/dimensions-insights-gender-balanced-leadership-delivers-more-opportunities/) found that if choosing between two comparable firms, they would invest twice as much in the firm with more gender diversity. They simply believe they will perform better.

Our goal should be to build inclusive boards and we cannot do that without this law in place. I’m not saying it is easy to meet requirements of boards, but you’re not asking to get rid of geographic balance to ensure rural Iowa voices are heard. You are assuming gender is the driving force in failing to fill positions. I don’t know that this is based in fact.

Some boards have returned to required in-person attendance, which does make it harder for Iowans to agree to serve. As the Senate has witnessed, we can be more transparent using zoom and increase participation.

I would ask if we are responding globally to an issue with a specific set of boards. I don’t know what the root cause of board vacancies is; is it frustration in general with government? Do we have too many boards and commissions with overlapping responsibilities? Have we done our best to engage community groups like the League or colleges to help grow a volunteer base?

If we have a gender gap, lets address it head on, not abolish the one thing that is keeping us on task to ensure women’s voices are heard where decisions are made in government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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