



Iowa Office of Civil Rights



**Annual
Report
FY 2025**



THE REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 SUMMARIZES IOCR'S MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, INCLUDING INCREASING THE NUMBER OF COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS WITH OUR FEDERAL PARTNERS, AND OUR DEDICATION TO PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH LEAN SIX SIGMA."

– 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.

In FY25, the IOCR rolled out its new mission and vision statements which further clarifies the daily work of the agency.

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.

Vision: The Iowa Office of Civil Rights is dedicated to upholding justice throughout the civil rights administrative process.

Another successful year was completed with over 1,150 complaints investigated by agency staff. Both the Employment+ and Housing Teams initiated process improvements to complete investigations of aging complaints. Additionally, agency staff completed 26 high-quality educational programs and outreach events; reaching over 600 Iowans.

This report covers agency results from July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025. While IOCR's data is complex due to many factors, including complexity of investigations, and opportunities outside of the administrative process to pursue complaints in district court, the data within this report provide insight into Iowa's civil rights administrative process and completion of investigations files with the agency.

Iowa's Office of Civil Rights is a small state agency (27 full-time employees and a budget of almost \$3 million) and processes over 2,000 civil rights complaints a year. 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 FY25 Annual Report in accordance with Iowa Code section 216.5(7).

Warm regards,





Iowa Office of Civil Rights

Mission: Provide impartial, efficient, and fact-driven investigative analyses of discrimination complaints filed in Iowa and promotes civil rights outreach and education opportunities throughout the state.

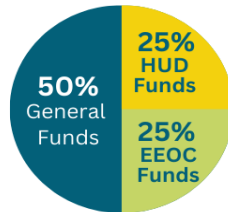
FY 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

IOCR APPROPRIATIONS

\$2,752,067 TOTAL

STATE FUNDS
\$1,385,921

FEDERAL REVENUE
\$1,366,146



AGENCY DEMOGRAPHICS

26/27 FTEs filled

Executive Director

Political Appointee
Confirmed by Senate

- 3 Legal Managers - PSM2
- 4 Attorney 2
- 2 Attorney 1
- 10 Civil Rights Specialists
- 1 Public Service Supervisor
- 4 Administrative Staff
- 1 Education and Outreach Coordinator
- 2 Temporary Part-Time Staff

ADMINISTRATION & REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

2,227

Complaint
Inquiries
Received

EMPLOYMENT+ PROGRAM

917

Investigations
submitted under
EEOC workshare
agreement

HOUSING PROGRAM

169

Investigations
submitted under
HUD workshare
agreement

EMPLOYMENT+ TIER 1

**842
TOTAL**

LEGAL
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTS FY25

**145
TOTAL**

TIER 2
LEGAL
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTS FY25

**OVER
600**

Iowans Reached
Through Outreach
Events

26

Educational
& Outreach
Events

LEGAL VICTORIES

OFFICE OF
CIVIL RIGHTS
VS.
MCKILLIP

Iowa Court of Appeals
affirmed IOCR's probable
cause determination for
sexual harassment in
housing - Feb. 2025

LITIGATION

4

CASES REFERRED
FOR LITIGATION

6

CASES IN ACTIVE
LITIGATION

Legislative Changes

SF418
Removal of gender
identity from the
Iowa Civil Rights Act

259

Right to Sue
Letters
Issued

Determinations of
Probable Cause

9

76

Mediations
Conducted

**OVER
\$273,000**

Settlements
Paid to Iowans

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

IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission is created under Iowa Code section 216.3 and is comprised of five members appointed by the Governor and subject to confirmation by the Iowa Senate. The five commissioners sit as the final decision-makers on contested case proceedings brought by the Agency. The commission did not hear any appeals in FY25.



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.



CHERYL ELSLOO
COMMISSIONER, PELLA, IA

Cheryl Elsloo began her first term on the Iowa Civil Rights Commission on May 1, 2024. She serves as an office

manager for a construction business. Cheryl has lived in Iowa her whole life, raised her family here and her children are raising their families here. She cares deeply about Iowa's future and believes it's each individual's responsibility to contribute to the support of the state motto, "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain." That is why Cheryl is grateful to serve on the Commission. Commissioner Elsloo's current term ends on April 30th, 2028



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.



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.



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.



Iowa Civil Rights Commissioners thanking Chairwoman Ordaz for her service to the Commission in April 2025.

IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS – FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT



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 1,150 INVESTIGATIONS IN FY25.”

– DIRECTOR STIFFLER ON ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS

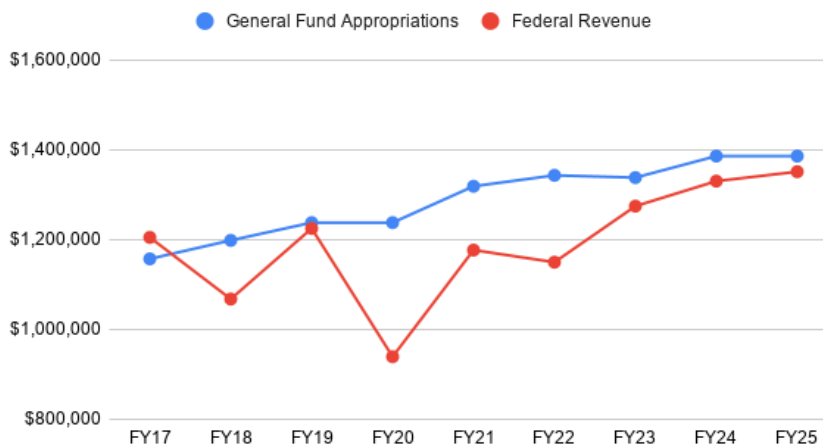
FISCAL OUTLOOK

The IOCR receives 50% of its operating budget from the General Fund, and 50% from the Federal Government. 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 amounts change from year to year and are based on federal appropriations to those agencies. IOCR's FY25 revenue and appropriation were \$2,752,067.

In FY25, the IOCR completed 917 joint employment investigations resulting in \$761,110. IOCR increased the number of EEOC employment investigations completed by 4% from FY24. The IOCR completed 169 joint housing investigations resulting in \$689,696.

HUD also offers opportunities to receive Partnership Funds which must be used to support the education and outreach activities by agency staff. IOCR received \$25,000 in Partnership Funds for FY25.

General Fund and Federal Appropriations



REGULATORY COMPLIANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS TEAM



“

THIS YEAR WAS ABOUT EMBRACING ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY TO ENSURE STATUTORY AND FEDERAL CONTRACT COMPLIANCE. I WANT TO COMMEND THE ADMIN TEAM FOR MOVING IOCR'S INTERNAL CASE MANAGEMENT PROCESS PAPERLESS. IT WAS A LARGE PROJECT THAT WAS COMPLETED TIMELY.”

– KAITLIN SMITH, REGULATORY COMPLIANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS MANAGER

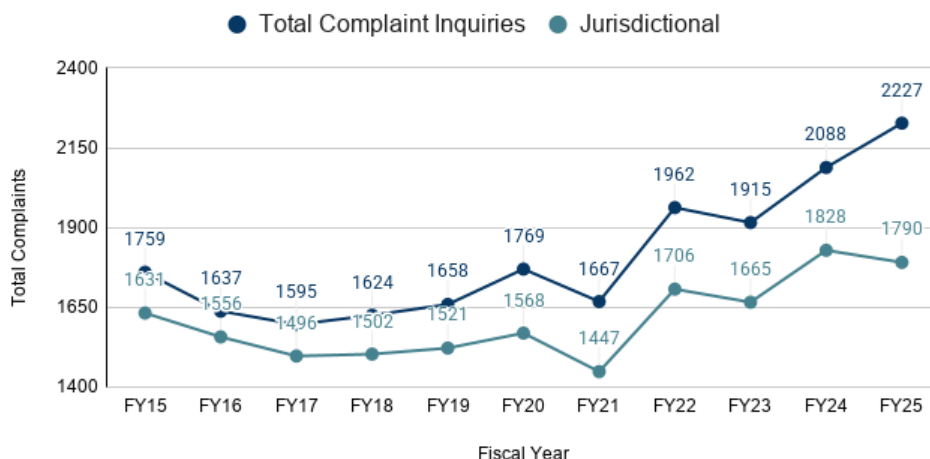
TEAM PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

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 FY25, the IOCR received over 2,200 alleged illegal discrimination inquiries, which is an increase of 26% since FY21. Over 400 inquiries were determined to be non-jurisdictional or not timely filed. The Administrative Process Team also completed 259 administrative releases (issuance of a “Right-to-Sue Letter”), allowing complainants to file a lawsuit in district court.

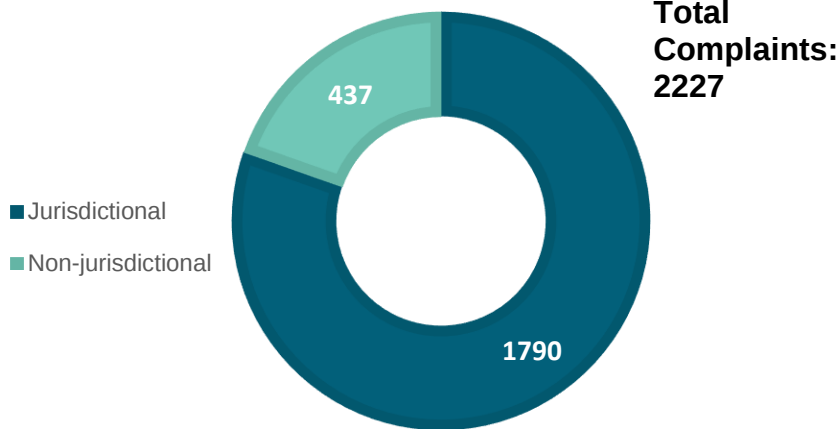
The IOCR transitioned its internal case management system to a paperless process. This process improvements with reduce processing times throughout the civil rights administrative process. In FY25, the IOCR issued four administrative closures for frivolous complaints to one complainant pursuant to IAC 3.47(4).

10 Year Complaint Data Complaints



Regulatory and Compliance by the Numbers

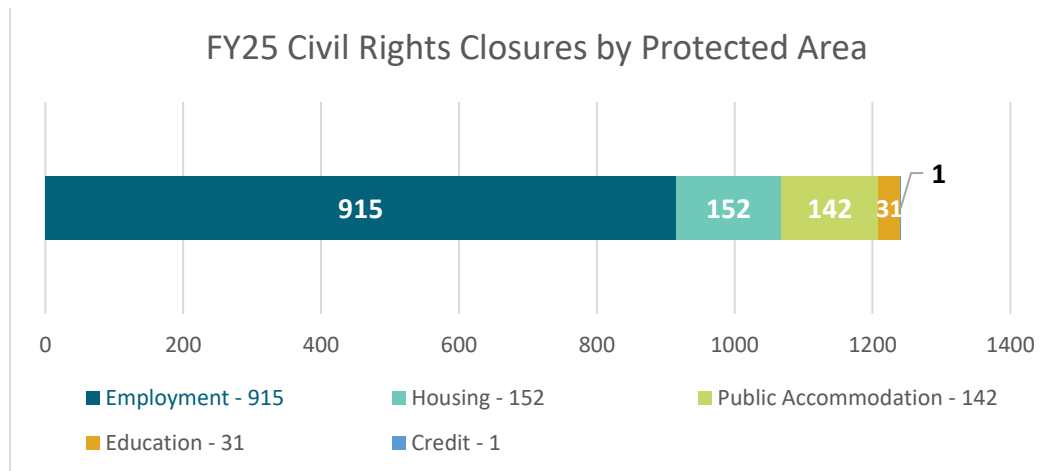
JURISDICTIONAL REVIEW FY25



The **first stage** of the civil rights complaint process is determining if the complaint is jurisdictional under Iowa code chapter 216. If an individual cannot connect the alleged adverse action with a protected basis, it will be deemed non-jurisdictional. Additionally, if a complaint is filed more than 300 days from the last day of the alleged discrimination then the inquiry will be deemed untimely.

The Iowa Civil Rights Act covers five areas where illegal discrimination is investigated:

- **Employment**
- **Housing**
- **Public Accommodation**
- **Education**
- **Credit**



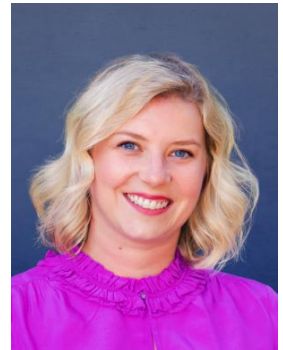
Take Aways:

- Two-thirds of all complaints of alleged discrimination are in the area of employment.
- Percentage averages are consistent year over year.

EMPLOYMENT+ INVESTIGATIONS

“

THE EMPLOYMENT+ TEAM PRIORITIZED COMPLETING TIER 2 INVESTIGATIONS IN FY25. WITH 145 TIER 2 INVESTIGATIONS COMPLETED, I'M APPRECIATIVE OF THE TEAM'S DEDICATION TO PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY LEGAL ANALYSES TO PARTIES.”



–AMY HEVERLY, 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 Office enters into an annual workshare agreement to complete those investigations.

In FY25, Employment+ completed 842 Tier 1 investigations. Over 145 Tier 2 investigations were completed on the files identified for additional investigation.

Of the 145 Tier Two investigations completed, three complaints were found to have probable cause that illegal discrimination occurred in the area of employment.

The IOCR offers free mediation to parties, regardless of representation by an attorney. In FY25, the office staff and volunteers mediated 76 cases.

IOCR ADMINISTRATIVE TERMS DEFINED:

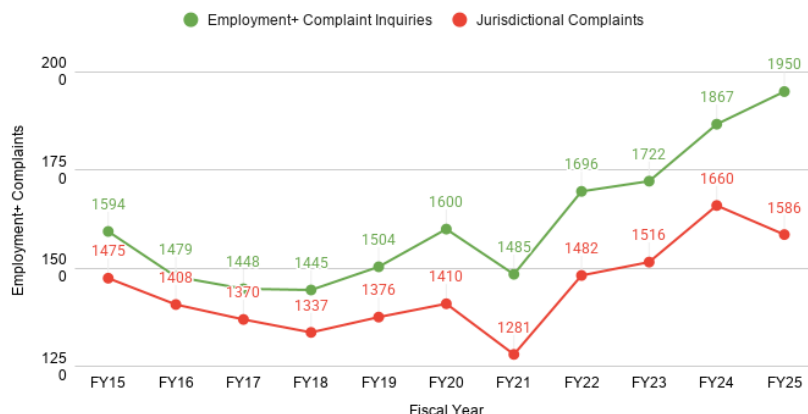
Tier 1 Investigation (formerly Screening)

Investigator reviews all available information, including questionnaires, generally does not evaluate credibility, and issues a Tier 1 Investigative Legal Report on whether the complaint warrants further investigation (Tier 2 Investigation) or whether the complaint does not warrant further investigation (facts of complaint do not meet the legal standard for illegal discrimination).

Tier 2 Investigation (formerly Investigation)

Investigator ask for additional evidence and documentation, interviews may be scheduled, and issue a Tier 2 Investigative Legal Report as to whether there is probable cause to believe illegal discrimination occurred.

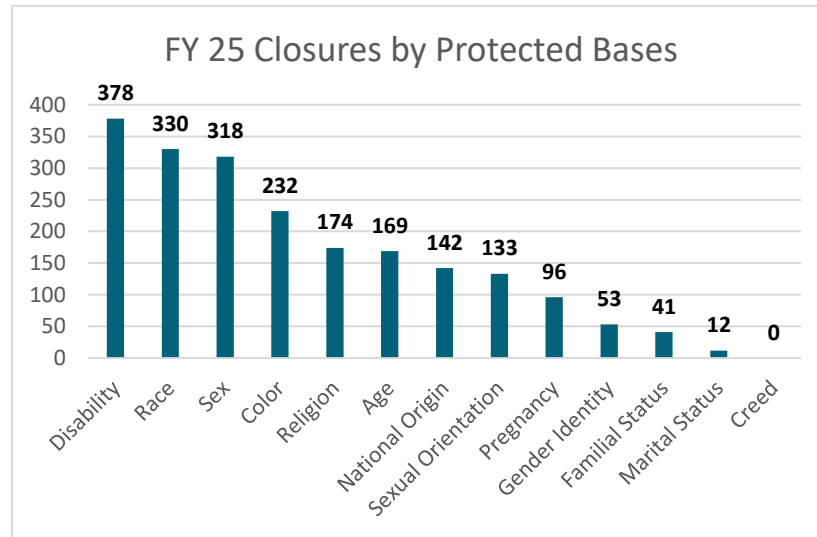
Employment+ Complaint Filings



Did you know...

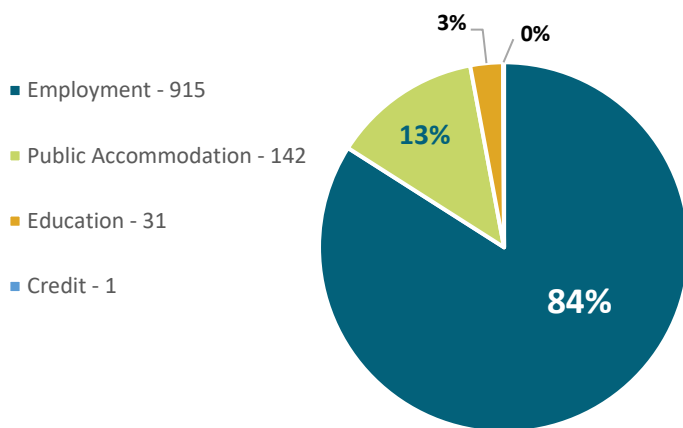
In 2023, the IOCR changed many of the terms used by the agency to better assist the public in understand the civil rights administrative process.

Employment+ by the Numbers

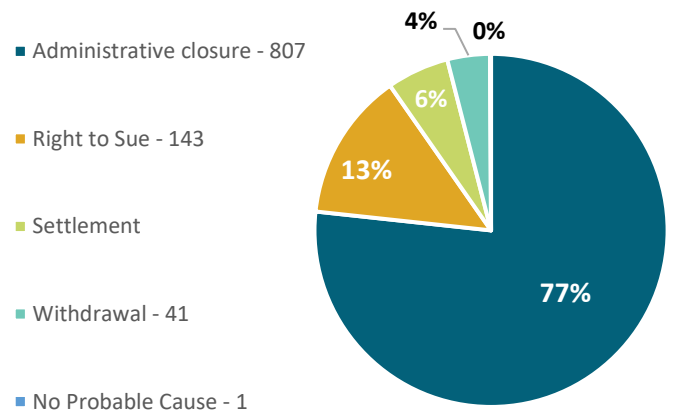


The bases that are investigated by the IOCR are self-selected by the complainant at the time of the filing. The complainant may select multiple bases to be investigated; however, the IOCR only investigates the bases where evidence is provided.

FY 25 Closures by Area



FY 25 Closure Type



There are numerous ways the IOCR can close a civil rights complaint. Administrative Closures (AC) are the most common closure for Employment+ complaints and occurs when the investigation concludes there is not enough evidence to meet the probable cause standard for illegal discrimination.

FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT



“

THE GOAL OF THE HOUSING TEAM WAS TO COMPLETE OVER 150 INVESTIGATIONS THROUGH HIGH QUALITY INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS AND MEDIATIONS EFFORTS, AND THE HOUSING TEAM DELIVERED.”

– KATIE FIALA, LEGAL MANAGER - HOUSING

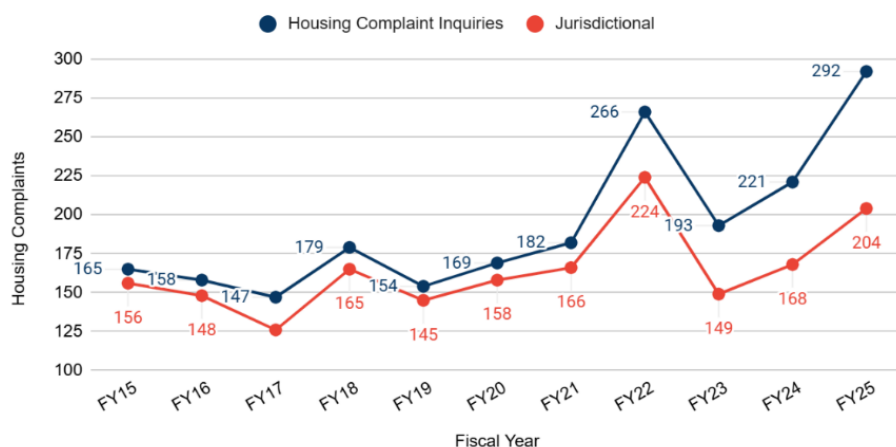
TEAM PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

The Housing Team processes and investigates complaints under the Iowa Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. The Office enters into an annual workshare agreement with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to complete investigations. In FY25, the Housing Team completed 169 investigations. Three of those investigations resulted in probable cause findings.

The IOCR settled 36 cases 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 Office 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.

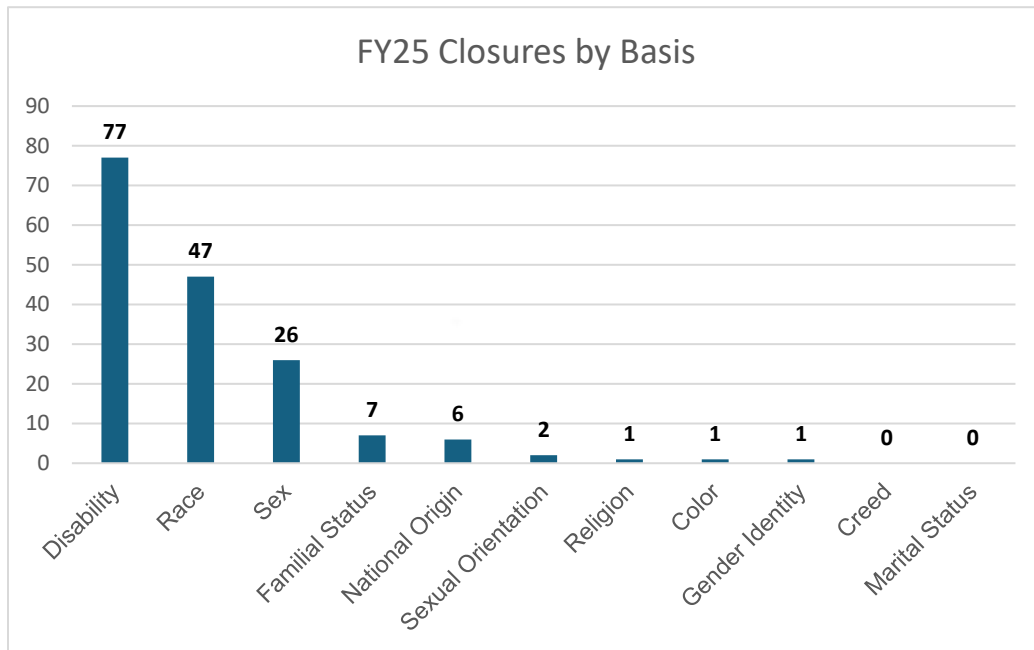
Housing Complaints Over 10 Years



Did you know...

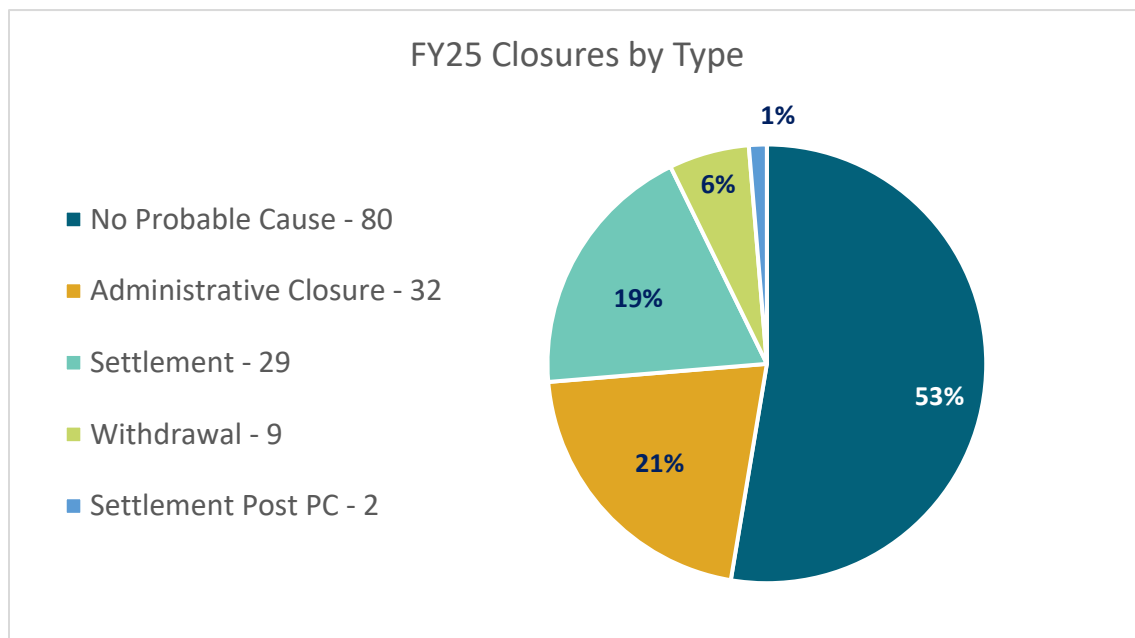
The IOCR is the largest Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) in the Midwest Region for HUD. FHAP is a partnership between the federal government and state and local agencies to provide protection to the public against discrimination in housing.

Housing by the Numbers



Disability continues to be the most common protected basis alleged for investigation.

Common examples of adverse action in disability discrimination can include, a request for accommodation (assistance animal, or parking space), and request for modification (grab bar in the shower).



IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS – LITIGATION

“

THE IOWA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION CONTINUED THEIR IMPORTANT WORK ENFORCING THE IOWA CIVIL RIGHTS ACT BY USING LITIGATION WHEN NECESSARY. THE OFFICE AND COMMISSION WORK TOGETHER TO ENFORCE THE ACT, AND USE THE SERVICES OF THE IOWA ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE WHEN RESOLUTION EFFORTS, SHORT OF LITIGATION, ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL.”

– KRISTEN STIFFLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NOTABLE LITIGATION HIGHLIGHTS

The Office referred six cases for litigation following a probable cause finding by the agency. Three of those cases were successfully settled prior to trial or administrative hearing. One additional case was filed in district court and remains pending. The final two cases remain in pre-litigation status with the agency.

Like in previous years, the Office also continued its work on probable cause cases that had been referred from litigation in earlier fiscal years. Most notably, the Office received a victory from the Iowa Court of Appeals, affirming its 2023 win in *Van Gundy v. McKillip Management, LLC*. The appellate court affirmed the district’s finding that the complainant’s property manager had sexually harassed her, and then retaliated against her when she rejected his sexual advances. In addition to receiving the final result for this case, the Office settled one case prior to its scheduled trial date and continued its litigation work towards the other three cases that were various stages of litigation prior to scheduled trial dates.

Legal Victories:

Iowa Court of Appeals, affirming its 2023 win in *Van Gundy v. McKillip Management, LLC*. The appellate court affirmed the district’s finding that the complainant’s property manager had sexually harassed her, and then retaliated against her when she rejected his sexual advances.

Q: What is the Legal Standard used by the IOCR?

A: Preponderance of the Evidence: The Iowa Office of Civil Rights utilizes the Preponderance of the Evidence legal standard when investigating complaints.



CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



NOTABLE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES FROM FY25

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 600 Iowans were reached through outreach efforts during the year.

In April, the IOCR celebrated the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Iowa Civil Rights Act at the Iowa State Capitol and had the opportunity to engage with Iowans and elected officials.

The IOCR staff attended 15 education and outreach events throughout the year and enjoyed meeting and educating Iowans about the Iowa Office of Civil Rights and how it serves Iowans. Director Stiffler and team hosted a student from Iowa Student Youth Advisory Council for a job shadow in the office. The Housing Team continues to provide free quarterly fair housing training specifically focused on compliance.

The IOCR was excited to recognize Craig Nierman, a volunteer mediator, with an individual Governor's Volunteer Award for his dedication to helping the office. Craig has volunteered over 250 hours completing mediations.



The IOCR team speaking to the public and legislators at the Iowa State Capitol to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Iowa Civil Rights Act.



Administrative and Compliance Manager, Kaitlin Smith, SYAC member Amal Eltayib, and Director Kristen Stiffler pose for a photo during Amal's job shadow day with the IOCR.



Housing Legal Manager, Katie Fiala, presenting at the Iowa League of Cities Spring Event.



IOCR Volunteer Mediator, Craig Nierman, receiving the Governor's Volunteer Award.



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Office of
Civil Rights