



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Group urges county board not to support affirmative-action resolution

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By Cedric Ricks

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

An organizer of a November ballot initiative to amend the state constitution to ban affirmative-action programs urged the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday night not to adopt a resolution in support of such programs.

"This initiative is about equal treatment under the law for all individuals without regard to their race or sex," said Jennifer Gratz, executive director of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative.

"One of the myths that is out there is that this initiative would eliminate all forms of affirmative action," Gratz said. "That is not true. If you consider preferential treatment to be affirmative action, then, in that sense, it will eliminate programs."

Ballot language will go before Michigan voters that would "ban affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin" in public employment, education or contracting.

Gratz spoke to the county board in response to County Administrator Don Gilmer's request that county commissioners consider passing a resolution affirming the benefits of the county's affirmative-action plan.

Gilmer said the proposed resolution was removed from Tuesday's agenda and will be considered by the county board at its June 6 committee-of-the-whole meeting. The county has had some form of affirmative action since 1975, he said.

In the county board's agenda packet, Gilmer and Jo Woods, the county's human-resource director, prepared a memo that offered some reasons for supporting affirmative action.

The memo said affirmative action includes identifying and dismantling discriminatory barriers such as biased testing or recruitment and hiring practices, and conducting outreach to under-represented women and minorities by targeting colleges and ethnic, media, women and minority organizations.

Instituting mentoring and targeted training programs, along with addressing hidden biases in recruitment, hiring, promotion and compensation practices, such as addressing unnecessary job requirements, also are examples of affirmative action, according to the memo.

Gilmer and Woods said in the memo that they believed the proposal from the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative is "misleading and will have unintended consequences."

"It won't stop the other preferences that permeate state and local hiring, promotion, contracts and education opportunity, and it will immediately eliminate affirmative-action programs that help women and minorities have a fair opportunity in education and jobs," the memo stated.

``Excluding race and gender while continuing to allow preferences for cronies, legacies, geography, income, military service, musical talent, athletic capability, family background, physical disabilities and other factors would be wrong."

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