



June 10, 2009

Human Relations Commission deserves funding

The Louisville Metro Council is making a serious mistake by placing the Human Relations Commission fourth from the bottom of its list of priorities.

Coming to light this week was an internal survey the Metro Council recently sent to Mayor Jerry Abramson listing programs and services in order of budgetary priority. The memorandum noted that those toward the bottom could be likely candidates for budget cuts. Sadly, the council placed the Human Relations Commission just above swimming pools.

The Human Relations Commission has a very important job that merits decent budgetary support. Its purpose is to safeguard equal opportunity for all. Like it or not, discrimination remains a daily concern for many people who are members of various minorities, ethnic groups, religions, who are foreign-born citizens or residents, who are women, or who have disabilities, and who need the help of the local government in order to protect and ensure their rights to equality. In times of economic hardship, the council should not push human rights issues to the side. To the contrary, this is when equal opportunity issues are more likely to arise.

With proper support of the Human Relations Commission, the necessary infrastructure is in place to address issues of equal opportunity. The agency hears and rules on discrimination complaints, mediates discriminatory disputes among members of the community, and provides awareness to people about civil rights laws and the obligations to comply. It administers the city certification process for businesses owned, operated, and controlled by minorities, women, and people with disabilities. It enforces the city policy to use and encourage the use of such contractors. It monitors the Affirmative Action plans of contractors and vendors doing business with Louisville Metro Government.

Major cities like Louisville not only thrive on the principles of equal opportunity and diversity, they are built upon them. Louisville has the highest number of minorities in the state. About 85,000 Louisville residents are African American, 600 are American Indian, 4,000 are Asian, and at least 5,000 are Hispanic. Almost 10,000 Louisvillians are foreign born. There are approximately 58,000 people with disabilities. Over 52 percent of the population is female. These individuals have civil rights protections that the Louisville Human Relations Commission functions to protect.

In order for Louisville to maintain its recent designation by the U.S. Conference of Mayors as America's "Most Livable Large City," the council should change its stance and make the Louisville Metro Human Relations Commission a high priority. This action will communicate to employers from other locations and who are looking to expand their businesses that people can come to Louisville from anywhere in the world and expect fair treatment and acceptance. It will tell everyone that in the City of Louisville all people count.

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