

# Commission on Human Rights

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## **Kentucky Human Rights Commission Executive Director encourages KY Dept. of Agriculture to foster diversity among its workforce, boards, councils and committees.**

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**August 6, 2012 – Louisville, KY** – In an open letter to the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, the Executive Director of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights (KCHR) has called on the Commissioner to foster greater diversity among the Department’s workforce as well as on the boards, councils and committees within the Department.

Executive Director John J. Johnson expressed concern at the absence of minority members on boards, councils and committees of the Kentucky Dept. of Agriculture and the department’s low number of female and minority employees. In fiscal year 2012, only one minority member served on the Department’s eleven reported boards, councils, and committees, representing less than 1% of total membership.

At their monthly meeting on August 3, 2012, KCHR commissioners showed support for the executive director’s letter to Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner James R. Comer, who only recently took the position, to urge him to address these issues and help increase female and minority membership and employment.

As the state government agency that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act, KRS 344.015, the KCHR receives Title VI reports from state cabinets, commissions and agencies. The reports detail the numbers of minority and female employees and minorities on boards, councils and committees. The KCHR recently received a Title VI report covering the period of July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.

“On its face, the report reflects woefully inadequate minority representation in both agency employment and on the various boards, councils, and committees formed within the Department of Agriculture,” said Johnson. “We recognize that Mr. Comer recently began his tenure as commissioner of the department, and that the unfortunate disparities of minority representation as reflected in the report have persisted over a period of years,” he said. “We ask Commissioner Comer and the department to foster greater diversity and minority representation in employment and on the boards, councils and committees within the department,” Johnson said.

According to the report, from a total workforce of 247 persons, the Department of Agriculture only employs 77 white females compared to 157 white males, six African American females, one African American male, one Hispanic male, two Asian females, two Asian males and one Native American female. In addition, the report states that there is only one minority member sitting on the department's 11 reported boards, councils and committees, which collectively consist of some 128 members. The Governor's 21-member Council on Agriculture was not included in the report, but for each of the preceding five years, no minority person was a member of this important council, Johnson said.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act. As an affiliate of federal government entities such as the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights enforces federal civil rights laws such as the Federal Civil Rights Act, the Federal Fair Housing Act, the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

The Kentucky Civil Rights Act, Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 344, prohibits discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and financial transactions. Protected classes include race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, age (40 years-old and over in employment), tobacco-smoking status in employment, and familial status, which protects in the area of housing pregnant women and families with children under 18 years-old. It is illegal to retaliate against any person who has made a discrimination complaint to the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.

For help with discrimination or to ask for free literature about civil rights, contact the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights at 1.800.292.5566. Or, visit the website at [www.kchr.ky.gov](http://www.kchr.ky.gov). From there, visit the commission Facebook and Twitter pages for news and announcements regarding protected classes and commission activities.