



October 21, 2013

Mayor Kookier/City Council
City of Rapid City
300 Sixth Street
Rapid City, SD 57701

RE: Proposed Ordinance 5964

Dear Mayor Kookier and City Council Members:

I am the Chief Executive Officer for Black Hills Works, a nonprofit organization that supports over 580 people with disabilities in our Rapid City community. As part of the role in our work to help provide our mission to our community, we not only spend a lot of time delivering direct supports to people, but we also work to advocate for people with disabilities to help facilitate meaningful roles that all members of our community can play. Part of that includes doing all we can to help ensure that people are not discriminated against. This work is best accomplished if there is a system in place that works in a productive way to help the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act be correctly implemented. From both of my perspectives, first as an advocate for people with disabilities who are susceptible to possible discrimination, and second, as the CEO for a large business and employer of over 560 people, I like having an option to resolve issues at the lowest and most local level possible.

I feel the best process to help meaningful and productive implementation of EEOC issues is by having a means to locally discuss the issues our community may be facing and having a strong system to be able to peacefully mediate the situations where our citizens have differences of opinions. I like the strong emphasis that this ordinance places on mediation and discussions, and working hard to come to a peaceful resolution before escalating any issues. My interpretation is that a lot of work would go into that at the early stages of working towards the resolution.

I also support the component of expanding the HRC authority to be able to work disagreements at our local level rather than going to the state level. I believe that any time we can resolve an issue at the level closest to the issue; we are going to end up with the solution that is best for those involved. At the state level, decision makers just are not going to be as invested as those that closer to the community. A local process will be faster, cheaper and lend itself to ensuring that all parties involved will feel that they have been heard and understood. Operating with a state level system can lend itself to people feeling like they are just one of a number in a line of a more bureaucratic system.

For those that might have concerns about our local public having knowledge into a business' private matters, the option written into this for either party to immediately take the concern to the state level is a good safety net. This also addresses people's concerns of not being comfortable with the local process or people making the decisions.

For those that are not sure that it is the city's business to be involved in this, I would encourage them to view it as giving our citizens a great alternative to keep them from having to go to a higher, state level process where they start making the decision about how our community is best run. This proposed ordinance allows a local process to occur where our community is in a better position to shape how we want issues resolved rather than being forced into accepting a higher authority's decisions about us.

Finally, for those that might have concerns about a Commission that is made of mayoral appointees having this much authority and power, I would view it as having the best balance of power that gives each individual citizen the best opportunity to have a say by the fact that the ordinance calls for the members to be appointed by both the mayor and approved by the council. This way, it is the people we vote into office that are making some of the structural decisions rather than the local citizens having no say into a state appointed board determining the outcomes.

For the above reasons, I ask that you support Ordinance 5964 to amend the powers, duties, and process of the Human Relations Commission.

Respectfully,



Brad Saathoff, CEO of Black Hills Works