BOARD OF REGENTS

Governing Iowa's Public Universities

Executive Director of the Iowa Board of Regents

Leadership Profile

September 2026



WittKieffer

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Executive Summary

The Iowa Board of Regents invites candidates who demonstrate the executive leadership, judgment, relationship-building, and administrative capabilities necessary to successfully serve as Executive Director. The Executive Director serves as the chief executive officer of the Iowa Board of Regents, providing strategic leadership for the Board Office while advancing the Board's priorities in support of Iowa's three public universities and affiliated enterprises. Reporting directly to the Board, the Executive Director serves as its principal advisor and spokesperson, operating at the intersection of governance, higher education, public policy, and state government. The Executive Director works closely with Regents, institutional presidents, senior university leaders, legislators, state agencies, and other stakeholders to advance the Board's mission and strategic objectives.

As leader of the Board Office, the Executive Director oversees a broad portfolio that includes governance, legislative affairs, strategic planning, institutional oversight, board relations, communications, finance, operations, and administration. The Executive Director serves as a trusted partner to the Board and institutional leaders, helping navigate a complex and highly visible higher education environment while ensuring alignment among institutional priorities, state interests, and Board objectives.

The Executive Director oversees 18 full-time employees in the Board Office, including six direct reports. The office is supported by state appropriations and institutional support, with a FY 2027 budget of just over $5.2 million. The office is located in Urbandale, part of the Des Moines metro area.

The Executive Director will have the opportunity to design a transparent process for developing the next strategic plan, coordinate all legislative activities on behalf of the Board and campus leadership, and lead a skilled and dedicated Board Office staff. The Executive Director will be an exceptional communicator across a broad range of constituents and a trusted voice in higher education.

An earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution is required, and an advanced degree is preferred. The successful candidate will have sufficient experience in the public sector and with contemporary trends in higher education, the ability to build relationships across campus constituencies, and the knowledge to speak on higher education issues with authority.

To submit a candidate nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy on page 12.

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Role of the Executive Director

The Executive Director serves as the chief executive officer of the Iowa Board of Regents providing strategic leadership for the Board Office while advancing the Board's priorities in support of Iowa's three public universities and affiliated enterprises. Reporting directly to the Board and overseeing a team of 18, the Executive Director serves as its principal advisor and spokesperson, operating at the intersection of governance, higher education, public policy, and state government. The Executive Director works closely with Regents, institutional presidents, senior university leaders, legislators, state agencies, and other stakeholders to advance the Board's mission and strategic objectives.

As more fully described in Board Policy, the Executive Director oversees a broad portfolio that includes governance, legislative affairs, strategic planning, institutional oversight, board relations, communications, finance, operations, and administration. The Executive Director serves as a trusted partner to the Board and institutional leaders, helping navigate a complex and highly visible higher education environment while ensuring alignment among institutional priorities, state interests, and Board objectives.

The Board of Regents Office

The Executive Director oversees 18 full-time employees in the Board Office, including six direct reports. The office is supported by state appropriations and institutional support, with a FY 2027 budget of just over $5.2 million. The office is located in Urbandale, part of the Des Moines metro area.

The Board staff is responsible for implementing the Board's governance strategies. Board staff provides professional and administrative support through review, analysis, and policy recommendations on all matters coming before the Board.

Strategic Plan

The Executive Director oversees the development and implementation of the Board's five-year strategic plan. Transformative Success for Iowa's Universities: 2022-27 Strategic Plan

The Executive Director will:

- Lead implementation of the Board's strategic plan and work closely with Board leadership, Board staff, and institutional leaders to advance systemwide priorities and long-term goals.
- Provide leadership and direction for the Board Office, including supervision, development, and evaluation of Board Office staff.
- Coordinate the Board's legislative agenda and budget strategy, ensuring alignment among the Board, Regent institutions, legislative liaisons, state agencies, and elected officials.
- Provide guidance on legislative proposals, policy initiatives, and regulatory matters affecting the Board and its institutions, including the development of legislative responses and policy recommendations.
- Foster productive working relationships with the Governor's Office, state legislators, agency leaders, and other external stakeholders while serving as a credible advocate for Iowa's public higher education system.
- Promote collaboration across the Regent institutions on significant academic, operational, and policy matters, helping ensure appropriate coordination while respecting institutional missions and autonomy.

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- Advise Board leadership on emerging issues, governance matters, and strategic opportunities, helping Regents focus on issues of greatest significance and long-term impact.
- Oversee Board Office administration, including financial oversight, human resources, organizational planning, risk management, and operational effectiveness.
- Ensure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, open meetings requirements, public records obligations, and Board policies.
- Execute contracts, agreements, bonds, leases, and other official documents as authorized by law, Board policy, or Board action.
- Serve as the lawful custodian of Board records and ensure the integrity and accessibility of official Board documentation.
- Strengthen communication and coordination throughout the Board Office and among the Regent institutions, fostering a culture of transparency, collaboration, accountability, and trust.
- Represent the Board and Iowa's public higher education system in state, regional, and national organizations, policy discussions, and external forums.
- Provide steady, effective leadership during periods of transition, including anticipated presidential searches, changes in Board membership, and evolving state policy priorities.



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Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The Executive Director reports directly to the Board of Regents and serves as a vital member of the Board Office leadership team. The Executive Director will be responsible for executing the Board's strategic initiatives, supporting the Board staff, and elevating the profile and external relations of the Regent system.

In addition, the Executive Director will be expected to:

Manage the Legislative Session: The Executive Director, along with the Chief Operating Officer and the State Relations officers, will implement the Board's strategy for each Iowa legislative session, which runs annually from January through April, maintaining a highly coordinated presence on behalf of the Board and the campuses. The Executive Director will arrange for the Regents' participation in key legislative meetings, attend all necessary legislative hearings, and interface with the governor's office at the Regents' direction. The Executive Director will be an effective advocate across policy, capital, and appropriations requests and will serve as a respected and trusted representative of the system for legislators, the governor's office, and other external partners, such as the community colleges and private universities.

Launch a Strategic Planning Process: The Board of Regents' current strategic plan concludes in 2027, and the Executive Director is expected to initiate a strategic planning process for the Board in early 2027. The Executive Director will work in close partnership with the Chief Academic Officer and all relevant constituents to develop a system-wide plan within which the three universities can align their own campus plans.

Inspire Trust in Higher Education: In the context of significant higher education reform and change in the national higher education landscape, the successful candidate will represent higher education with deep understanding, authenticity, humility, and gravitas, developing trust among a very broad set of constituents. From staff, faculty, and students to donors and policymakers, the Executive Director will embody integrity and earn trust through exceptional communications and transparent decision-making.

Support a Highly Functioning Board Office: The Board Office is fortunate to have a highly skilled, seasoned group of professionals with very low turnover and positive morale. The Board Office enjoys an enviable level of commitment from its long-time staff, all while interfacing with a hospital system, three universities, nine regents, policymakers, and a myriad of external stakeholders. The Executive Director provides leadership to Board staff while simultaneously respecting their subject-matter expertise, institutional knowledge, and relationships. The Executive Director will be expected to learn the specialized functions within the Board Office, including academic affairs, facilities planning and management, and finance, and to encourage effective communication within the Board Office and with the Regents and external partners.

Elevate the Profile of Iowa Higher Education: The Executive Director will strive to elevate the profile of the Regent system at the state and national level. The Executive Director will represent Iowa higher education at SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association) and elsewhere, advancing awareness of Iowa public universities and building trust in the value of higher education more broadly through a demonstrated commitment and passion for the mission of public higher education.

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Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The Iowa Board of Regents seeks in its next Executive Director a highly respected and versatile leader who combines political acumen, sound judgment, strategic thinking, and executive-level leadership with a deep commitment to public higher education and the citizens of Iowa. The Executive Director will possess the ability to navigate the intersection of governance, higher education, public policy, government, and public accountability while building trust among Regents, institutional leaders, government officials, and stakeholders across the state.

The successful candidate will bring a broad perspective, exceptional communication skills, and a demonstrated ability to lead in complex and highly visible environments. Above all, the Executive Director will be collaborative, adaptable, transparent, and committed to advancing the mission of Iowa's public universities while fostering strong relationships, organizational stability, and public confidence in higher education.

The ideal candidate will possess many of the following qualities, experiences, and characteristics:

- ***Higher Education Knowledge and Experience:*** A strong understanding of higher education governance, administration, public policy, and the issues shaping colleges and universities today, such as affordability, student success, workforce development, research, technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, demographic trends, and public confidence in higher education. Experience working within or in close collaboration with public higher education institutions, systems, governing boards, or state agencies is preferred.

- ***External Relations and Advocacy:*** Exceptional communication and relationship-building skills, with the credibility and presence to serve as an effective advocate for Iowa's public universities. The successful candidate will be comfortable representing the Board with legislators, state officials, agency leaders, community partners, the media, and national higher education organizations, and possess the judgment, diplomacy, and political awareness necessary to build consensus, manage competing viewpoints, and keep attention focused on long-term priorities and outcomes

- ***Collaborative Leadership and Consensus Building:*** A demonstrated ability to bring together constituencies around shared goals while fostering productive working relationships across institutions and stakeholder groups. The Executive Director will value collaboration, encourage open communication, and build trust through transparency, consistency, and inclusion.

- ***Organizational and Administrative Leadership in a Complex Environment:*** Demonstrated success overseeing organizational operations, personnel matters, policy implementation, and institutional effectiveness, leading a complex organization or enterprise with responsibility spanning multiple functional areas, including strategy, operations, policy, finance, communications, human resources, governance, and external relations. The successful candidate will understand how to lead high-performing teams, establish accountability, and create an environment where talented professionals are empowered to succeed.

- ***Financial and Operational Acumen:*** Knowledge of budgeting, resource allocation, internal controls, risk management, capital planning, and organizational administration. Experience aligning resources with strategic priorities in a public-sector or higher-education environment is highly desirable.

- ***Public Sector Awareness and Accountability:*** Experience operating within environments characterized by public scrutiny, transparency requirements, open meetings laws, public records obligations, and stakeholder accountability. The successful candidate will appreciate the responsibilities and visibility associated with public higher education governance.

- ***Exceptional Communication Skills:*** Outstanding written, verbal, and interpersonal communication abilities. The successful candidate will be a thoughtful listener, an effective facilitator, and a persuasive communicator capable of engaging audiences ranging from Regents and institutional leaders to legislators, state officials, faculty, staff, students, and the public.

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- ***Integrity, Emotional Intelligence, and Professional Judgment:*** The Executive Director will possess the qualities of an exceptional leader, including humility, integrity, discretion, resilience, intellectual curiosity, sound judgment, and political savvy. The successful candidate will be an active listener who seeks input, values diverse perspectives, addresses conflict constructively, and consistently earns the trust and confidence of others.

- ***Commitment to the Mission of Public Higher Education:*** A genuine appreciation for the important role Iowa's public universities play in advancing educational opportunity, research, workforce development, economic vitality, healthcare, and quality of life throughout the state. The successful candidate will be a passionate advocate for the value and impact of public higher education.

Qualifications

The Board seeks candidates whose professional experience demonstrates the executive leadership, judgment, relationship-building, and administrative capabilities necessary to successfully serve as Executive Director of the Board of Regents. An earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution is required, and an advanced degree is preferred. The successful candidate will have sufficient experience in the public sector and with contemporary trends in higher education to earn the respect of university faculty and to speak on higher education issues with authority.



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About The Iowa Board of Regents

Overview

Created by the Iowa General Assembly in 1909, the Iowa Board of Regents is a group of nine volunteer citizens who govern the three public higher education institutions in the state through policymaking, coordination, and oversight. The Board enhances the quality of life for Iowans by maintaining the educational quality, accessibility, and public service activities of Iowa's three public universities – the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa.

The Board's nine members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Iowa Senate to serve staggered six-year terms. They elect one member to serve as president and another to serve as president pro-tem for two-year terms. One member must be a full-time graduate or undergraduate student at one of the universities at the time of their appointment, and no more than five members may be from the same political party.

The Board is required by statute to meet at least four times a year. The meetings are open to the public, except when Iowa's open meetings law permits closed sessions for specific reasons, such as discussing personnel matters or pending litigation.

The Board of Regents is statutorily authorized by Iowa Code Chapter 262, which grants the Board the authority to "have and exercise all the powers necessary and convenient for the effective administration of its office and of the institutions under its control..." The broad responsibilities of the Board of Regents include:

- Creating strategic plans for the Board and approving mission statements and strategic plans for the institutions, as well as monitoring progress toward strategic goals.
- Creating and monitoring the implementation of broad policies.
- Reviewing and approving academic programs.
- Approving budgets, tuition and fees, bonding, investment policies, and other business and finance matters.
- Managing and controlling property and capital projects.
- Hiring and evaluating the performance of university presidents.
- Maintaining oversight on matters related to personnel and employment relations, administering the Regent Merit System, and coordinating Regent collective bargaining activities.
- Serving as trustees of University of Iowa Health Care.
- Monitoring and coordinating legislative matters and interactions with other state agencies.
- Conducting studies and investigations, either alone or in association with the institutions and/or other agencies, and reporting findings and recommendations.

Mission

The mission of the Regent universities is to:

- Produce and disseminate knowledge
- Prepare students to make positive contributions to society
- Serve the state of Iowa to expand opportunities

Vision

The Board of Regents will lead an accessible, internationally renowned system that provides education, conducts research, and benefits Iowa, the nation and the world.

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Impact

The Regent universities combined to add $18 billion in income to the state of Iowa's economy during fiscal year 2023-24. That figure is approximately 7.7% of the state's gross state product.

Iowa's public universities awarded more than 18,000 degrees during the 2024-25 academic year.

Institutions

The Board of Regents provides governance and oversight to Iowa's three public universities – the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa.

The University of Iowa

The University of Iowa is known around the world for its commitment to balanced excellence in the arts and sciences. It is the top-ranked public university for writing across the disciplines and home to the first creative writing program in the world, as well as a top-five public nursing program and one of the top teaching hospitals in the country. Its faculty, staff, and students have pioneered fields such as educational testing and speech pathology, sent UI-built instruments on virtually every space mission in NASA history, and traced the genetic origins of countless human diseases. Its 12 colleges are home to scholars dedicated to bridging disciplines and reinventing higher education.

Quick Facts:

- Founded in 1847.
- NCAA Division I Athletics. Member of the Big Ten Conference.
- Member of the Association of American Universities (AAU).
- The first American public university to admit men and women on an equal basis.
- The first American public university to award law degrees to women and African Americans.
- Iowa invented the Master of Fine Arts degree, becoming the first institution to accept creative work in lieu of a written thesis.
- Iowa attracted $771.7 million in external funding during FY 2026, with $536 million going toward research, scholarship, and creative activities.

Iowa State University

Iowa State University embraced land-grant ideals – access, practical education, shared knowledge – from the start. Today, ISU is known for excellence in science and technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship that seeks to make the world a better place; a student-centered culture with faculty and staff dedicated to student success; and a commitment to improving Iowans' quality of life through research-based extension and outreach-delivered education and resources. "Science With Practice," part of the university's seal for more than 150 years, aptly describes Iowa State's core ideal of hands-on learning and the application of science to practical problems.

Quick Facts:

- Founded in 1858.
- NCAA Division I Athletics. Member of the Big 12 Conference.
- Carnegie R1 very-high-research-activity university.
- ISU Extension serves Iowans across the state.
- Iowa State attracted $487.9 million in external funding, including $254.6 million in research funds.

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The University of Northern Iowa

The University of Northern Iowa is a comprehensive institution distinguished by its focus on undergraduate education. The university provides a high-quality and diverse educational experience, purposefully guiding students to find and develop their strengths and prepare them for success after college. Building on its historic excellence in teacher education, the university has developed outstanding programs in business, natural sciences, humanities and fine arts, health, and applied engineering, with advanced degrees available across many of them. The university continues to vigorously pursue its role as a leader in pre-K-12 education and education-related issues in Iowa and the nation.

Quick Facts:

- Founded in 1876.
- NCAA Division I Athletics. Member of the Missouri Valley Conference.
- Comprehensive Regional University.
- Recognized as a Best Midwest University by U.S. News & World Report.
- A top veteran-friendly college, as ranked by Military Friendly.

Leadership

Robert Cramer, Board President



After growing up outside West Des Moines, Robert Cramer moved to Johnston for high school. He graduated from Iowa State University in 1990 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Construction Engineering and became a Licensed Professional Engineer in 1996.

Cramer served as Co-President of Cramer and Associates, Inc., a family- and employee-owned bridge construction company, until January 1, 2022. At that time, he stepped away from the bridge side of the business and now works as Vice President of Land Development. While Co-President, Cramer oversaw engineering, estimating, accounting, safety, human resources, and risk management. Now, he serves as Co-Chair of the Cramer board and is overseeing their large land development in Adel and a smaller one in Altoona.

Cramer is on the Industry Advisory Council for the Construction Engineering Department at Iowa State University and is on the statewide STEM Advisory Board. He served as President of the Associated General Contractors of Iowa (AGC) in 2010, was a member of their Board of Directors for eight years, and continues to serve the AGC as liaison to the Iowa Department of Transportation. He served nine years on the Johnston Community School Board and on several non-profit boards, including his church.

One such board was Blessman International. Cramer's sister and brother-in-law run the ministry in South Africa, which now feeds several million "Meals From The Heartland" per year to children in need. Cramer also served on the board of The Family Leader and on the Advisory Board of Starts Right Here, Will Keeps' non-profit that is helping kids from the streets get back in school and graduate.

He and his wife, Lori, have two adult children and have opened their home to foster children for nine years. They cared for over 20 kids during that time.

Cramer was appointed to the Board by Governor Reynolds on March 3, 2023, with his term beginning on May 1st. His term expires on April 30, 2029. He was elected President of the Board, his term beginning December 4, 2025.

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Kurt Tjaden, President Pro Tem



Kurt Tjaden, a long-time executive with numerous international corporate positions, brings more than 35 years of business experience to the Board of Regents.

Tjaden retired in 2022 from HNI Corporation after nearly 15 years with the company, concluding with a five-year stint as President-International. Tjaden has been active with Iowa State University, serving on the Alumni Association Board of Directors and, most recently, as the Acting Alumni Association's Lora and Russ Talbot President and CEO. He currently serves on the ISU Foundation Board of Directors and the Ivy College of Business Dean's Advisory Council. He has previously taught in the Ivy College of Business as a professor of practice

Originally from Charles City, and more recently from Bettendorf, Tjaden graduated from Iowa State in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in accounting and earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Pepperdine University in 1990. He was appointed to the Board on March 12, 2025, by Governor Reynolds, with his term beginning May 1, 2025. His term expires April 30, 2031. He was elected President Pro Tem of the Board with his term beginning December 4, 2025.

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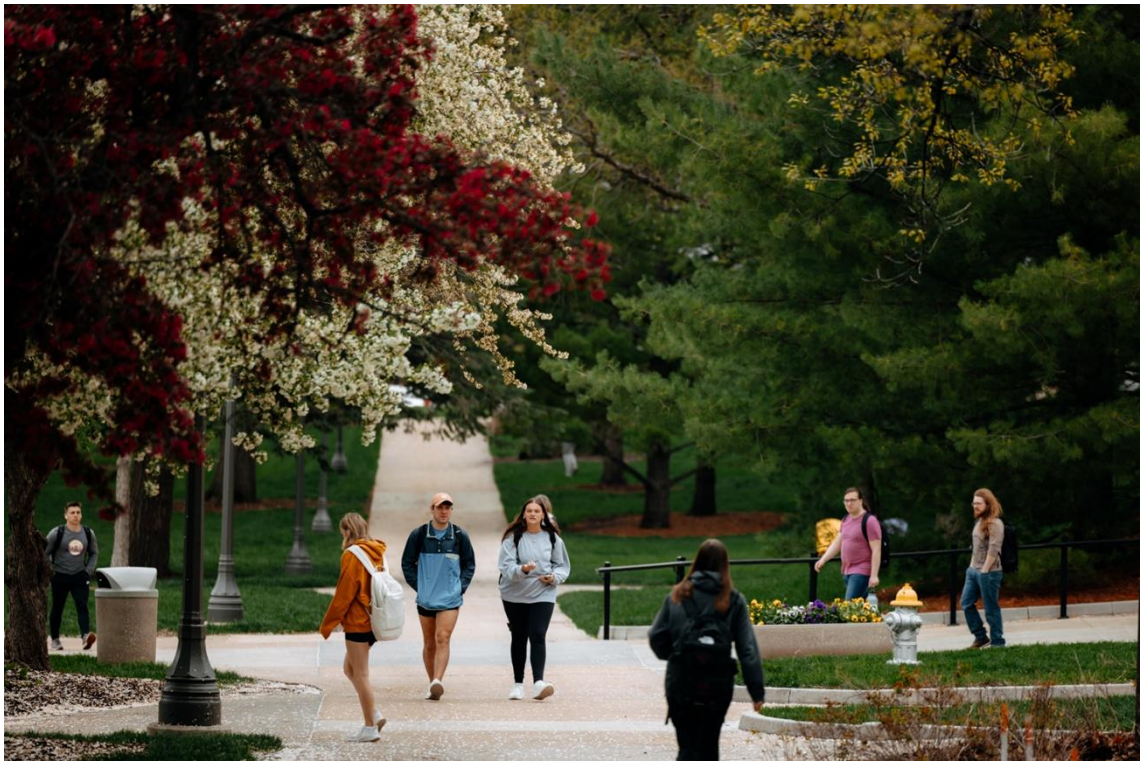
Living in Greater Des Moines

Greater Des Moines offers an outstanding quality of life, combining the energy and amenities of a growing metropolitan area with the accessibility, affordability, and sense of community for which Iowa is known. The region features a vibrant downtown, a nationally recognized food and craft beverage scene, arts and cultural attractions, live music and theater, professional and collegiate sports, and a wide variety of festivals and community events. Signature destinations include the Pappajohn Sculpture Park, Des Moines Art Center, Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, Iowa State Capitol, and the internationally recognized Iowa State Fair.

Outdoor recreation is also an important part of life in Central Iowa, with an extensive network of trails, parks, lakes, golf courses, and other recreational opportunities throughout the region. Des Moines is surrounded by thriving communities, including West Des Moines, Waukee, Ankeny, Johnston, Urbandale, and Clive, offering a wide range of housing options, shopping, dining, entertainment, and community amenities.

As Iowa's capital city, Des Moines is also the center of state government and home to a strong and diverse business community, providing opportunities for professional, civic, and community engagement. With convenient commutes, a welcoming atmosphere, excellent amenities, and easy access to communities throughout the state, Greater Des Moines provides an attractive setting to build both a career and a life.

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Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting the Iowa Board of Regents in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by November 13, 2026.

Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's **candidate portal**.

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Melody Rose, Ph.D. and Ashlee Musser

IowaRegentsED@wittkieffer.com

The Iowa Board of Regents does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, religion, national origin, pregnancy, sexual orientation, genetic information, sex, marital status, disability, status as a U.S. Veteran, or any other classification protected by law.

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