



20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 1301
Chicago, Illinois 60606

312.587.8390 Main Line

312.587.8391 Fax

www.mwalliance.org

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Iowa Legislature - State Government (H)
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Members of the State Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the structure and organization of Iowa's Building Code Advisory Council. The Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA) is a member-based, non-profit organization promoting energy efficiency to optimize energy generation, reduce consumption, create jobs and decrease carbon emissions in all Midwest communities. We have worked in Iowa and other states to provide technical assistance and education on energy efficient building policies since 2009.

MEEA believes that preserving the Iowa State Building Code Advisory Council (Council) is vital for safeguarding the health and safety of homeowners and occupants. Like other construction codes, energy and building codes play a crucial role in ensuring a healthy indoor environment and enhancing the resilience of homes during emergencies or adverse weather conditions. These codes establish minimum standards that protect occupants and provide peace of mind for homebuyers, who may not be aware of these essential safeguards. To accurately assess and adopt the best building standards, it is pertinent that the Council is comprised of key experts and valuable stakeholders.

Risks Presented by the elimination of the Building Code Advisory Council

The Council was created in 1972 and, since then, has been made up of "persons who are qualified by experience or training to provide a broad or specialized expertise on matters pertaining to building construction."¹ As such, the Council plays a crucial role in developing and advising on building codes. By eliminating it and shifting its responsibilities directly to the Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing (DIAL), Iowa risks losing the valuable input of experts who possess specialized knowledge not only in building construction but also in building design, energy efficiency, health and safety, economics and environmental impacts.

Furthermore, maintaining the Council ensures that stakeholders, including representatives from the building trades and other relevant industries, have a voice in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach helps ensure building codes reflect the needs and priorities of our communities while promoting energy efficiency and sustainability. Efforts to streamline oversight and advisory mechanisms must not come at the expense of expertise and stakeholder engagement. By preserving the Council, we can continue to benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experience that its members bring to the table.

According to proposed changes, the Building Code Commissioner (Commissioner) would no longer have the advisory council to lean on for code insights but rather those duties revert to him as head of the Department. Placing the responsibility of reviewing, enacting and updating these codes solely on DIAL and the Commissioner poses significant challenges. Without the guidance of appointed experts, there is a heightened risk of implementing regulations that may not be

¹ Iowa State Building Code § 103A.14

effective or may even hinder the process. Moreover, the Commissioner may be placed under excess burden to make complex decisions without the full understanding of the technical details. This burden should not fall solely on The Commissioner. Rather, it should be a collective effort among those who have training and experience in topics like building science, architecture, energy use and efficiency, economics, environmental impact assessment, environmental justice, and more. People spend most of their lives inside buildings. It is crucial that they are safe, affordable and environmentally sustainable, and energy codes guarantee these protections by prescribing strong, educated building standards.

Strength of the Composition of the Current Building Code Advisory Council.

Building codes are intricate technical documents that require specialized knowledge to develop and implement effectively. It is crucial that state departments work closely with code and technical experts due to their guidance and nuanced understanding of building construction and energy efficiency. One of the key strengths of the Council is its composition, for it requires a broad range of experts and stakeholders to consider and determine the appropriate code standards that should be in place for the state. This includes members with diverse backgrounds and expertise in building science. As currently written, “The members of the council shall be people who are qualified by experience or training to provide a broad or specialized expertise on matters pertaining to building construction”². These experts analyze past experiences, technological advancements, scientific research and industry best practices to update and refine the codes.

These members, potentially made up of building designers, environmental representatives, energy efficiency experts, economics, and health and safety officials, provide invaluable insights and perspectives that contribute to the development of effective building codes. It is essential to note that if changed, the Commissioner would no longer have the discretion to choose three members of the Council to make up a Board of Review. Instead, the board would need to comply with the prescribed list of building and construction professionals, leaving no room for others with additional expertise on matters related to building construction. While the knowledge and input of building and construction professionals is important to consider, it cannot be the only knowledge and input to consider when developing code standards. Advice from both the trades industry and other related fields is necessary to adopt the most beneficial building code for the state and its citizens. The wisdom and collaboration facilitated by the Iowa State Building Code Advisory Council are paramount in advancing energy efficiency goals, promoting public health and safety, and positioning Iowa as a champion in building practices.

If you have any questions about this testimony, or general impact and analysis of building energy codes, please contact Isabella Gross, Building Codes and Policy Associate for MEEA at igross@mwalliance.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Paige Knutsen, Executive Director

² Iowa State Building Code § 103A.14