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YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
1099 Iowa Street Dubuque, Iowa

January 5, 1964

The Honorable James E. Brownell
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D. C.

My dear Mr. Brownell:

Our Public Affairs Committee want you to know that we are proud that you, as our Representative from the 2nd District of Iowa, played a large part in getting the Civil Rights Bill approved and reported out of the Judiciary Committee in October, 1963. However, we are now asking you to use all your influence with your fellow Congressmen from Iowa, as well as the other States, in getting this bill to the floor of the House without further delay. We ask further that you vote for this bill when it comes before the House, and that you further use your influence as the Representative of the people of the 2nd District of Iowa, to encourage Senators Hickel and Miller to vote favorably on this piece of legislation when it comes before the Senate.

I am sure that you are well aware of the purposes and functions of the YWCA, but I would like to explain to you that the Public Affairs Committee of the Dubuque branch of the YWCA has been attempting for the past two years to break through the segregation that surrounds our Dubuque Negro citizens. We were successful in getting a bi-racial committee of local women organized. The committee is not large, it is true, but what it lacked in size it more than made up in sincerity and enthusiasm. We succeeded in getting a number of other organizations, civic, Protestant and Catholic, interested, and as a result, Dubuque has finally set up a Human Relations Commission.

During the past two years particularly, our little group has found out a great deal of how segregation works in an Iowa community where no one ever admits to any kind of discrimination against his fellow-man for any reason whatsoever.

Mr. Bromwell, #2.

One of the members of our Public Affairs Committee, Mrs. Tom A. Tully, mentioned at one of our meetings last fall that she had heard over one of the newscasts from one of the Iowa T-V stations, a statement attributed to you in which you stated you believed Iowa could be proud of the position she holds in race relations--that Iowa is one of the progressive and most enlightened in this matter.

Frankly, Mr. Bromwell, it may be that this statement might be true of some sections of Iowa, but you have one city, Dubuque, in your 2nd District, which does not have to take a back seat for any town in the South when it comes to anti-Negro discrimination. Iowa State Senator Andrew Fronselt from Dubuque, expressed this fact in those exact words when he spoke to a joint meeting of the YWCA Public Affairs Committee and the Dubuque League of Women Voters last spring. On checking surveys made by the Des Moines Register on this problem, it appears that Dubuque's record is bad, but according to the Register, so are many other Iowa communities.

We do not have segregated schools in Iowa, nor segregated playgrounds or swimming pools, but how much are these rights worth when our Negro citizens cannot compete on an equal basis for jobs or houses to live in? We could tell you of one incident after another in Dubuque--discrimination ranging from the most subtle to outright insult and refusal of service in taverns and restaurants in Dubuque; the impossibility of finding suitable accommodations for overnight visits in Dubuque; the impossibility of a Negro man getting a job in Dubuque with the exception of janitorial work, car washing, shoe shining, or railroad construction work if he is extremely lucky; and then there are the little things like the difficulty of getting a haircut, or the total impossibility of a Negro woman to have her hair shampooed and set in a Dubuque beauty parlor. So far as housing is concerned, the next time you visit Dubuque, please ask to see the area where our Negroes live, and then ask where else they could live should they want to move.

We are indeed aware, Mr. Bromwell, that it is not easy for a Congressman to decide whether he dare take the risk of taking a firm and aggressive stand on a bill that not only his own political party, but the entire nation, is divided on. However, we do believe that Iowans are a good and decent people, a religious people, who know in their hearts there is only one way to decide on this issue. We believe these people will welcome a strong Federal Civil Rights bill that will relieve them of the responsibility of standing up as individuals to fight for the rights of a minority. You know, Mr. Bromwell, most of us just want to be left alone, to live as we want to, but when we are faced with the knowledge that we have passively participated in injustice to our neighbor, even through ignorance of his plight, we don't like it! We Americans, raised on the creed of "fair play", don't live too successfully with burdens of guilt, and that is the great "American dilemma" we are pilloried on today.

We hope we will soon hear that our Representative from the 2nd District of Iowa has decided to fight vigorously for the Civil Rights Bill--you will never regret it.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) Louise Halliburton, Chairman
Public Affairs Committee