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House Government Operations Committee

April 4, 2018 8:30AM

Testimony S. 281

Diana Wahle, Community Equity Collaborative

Thank you for this opportunity to review the version of S.281 approved by the Senate. The Community Equity Collaborative fully supports this bill. In consultation with members of the Collaborative, I share the following recommendations. Please know we want this plan to succeed.

DEFINING THE WORK

Include a definition of Institutional Racism in the bill. Maybe something along these lines:

“Institutional attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that inform policies and practices that privilege the dominant racial and linguistic group, which includes white people and people for whom English is their first language.”

The mitigation of racism in our State government is a process not taken lightly. We need to recognize the enormous scope of the task at hand and understand this effort will take at least ten years to make meaningful change.

ADVISORY PANEL

The majority of panel membership should be people of color.

CHIEF CIVIL RIGHTS OFFICER POSITION

We are not sure the title “Chief Civil Rights Officer” correctly describes the depth of the work – perhaps “Chief Equity Officer” describes it better? The title requires some discussion before it is finalized.

We need to step back and reflect on how a single Chief Civil Rights Officer focusing on discrimination and racial issues has fared in other work settings. This approach is well-known and sadly has all too frequently not succeeded. A highly qualified person of color is appointed and expected to solve the institution’s issues. What evolves is they do not have enough back-up or authority and end up resigning in frustration.

Our recent experience at Brattleboro’s School for International Training (SIT) is an important lesson. Last year, after much discord between the school’s administration and its graduate students of color, a Chief Diversity Officer was hired. She was a good choice, highly skilled with excellent credentials. However, SIT did not prepare for the steps required to implement the strategy she introduced. She was isolated on the SIT administrative team and therefore ineffective. Within four months, she had resigned.

How do we insure this Officer has the necessary power within various spheres of influence in State government? How to make sure we “have the Officer’s back”? In advance, there is a need for buy-in from Administrative leadership.

This work dovetails with the State’s mandate for results-based accountability. In close collaboration with the Chief Performance Officer and each State agency and department, the Civil Rights Officer will develop performance targets and performance measures:

- ⇒ in defining racial equity related to Conditions of Well-being for All Vermonters
- ⇒ in defining racial equity in measuring program performance for each branch of government

See examples attached. The Vermont State Police and VTrans have made excellent progress in these areas.

COMPREHENSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

We see this inventory as a “power analysis” of State government focusing on institutional racism. The depth of the inquiry relates to the quality of the outcome. Key areas of inquiry will include recruitment, hiring, retention, workplace culture and client advocacy.

The needs assessment/inventory is a building block in a long-term strategy. It is the beginning of racial disparities education where the focus is on relationship building. We need to be aware that by unveiling what has not worked, this inventory is excavating peoples’ worst fears. We are asking participants to name how privilege is operating in their work setting. A carefully crafted design will result in honest feedback. The hope is to use methods promoting effective conversations – perhaps through focus groups—that the Civil Rights Officer can use as a guide. A multitude of disparities will be identified in this process.

Recommendations on training curriculum and particular training needs would be included in the assessment.

TRAINING CURRICULUM

The Civil Rights Officer’s responsibilities include the oversight of a comprehensive training curriculum which will respond to the needs outlined in the inventory related to recruitment, hiring, retention, workplace culture and client advocacy. Curriculum content includes:

Understanding our own social identity as members of the dominant culture related to race.

Knowledge of institutional and structural racism in Vermont and nationally. Gaining an understanding of the underpinnings of race as a social construct.

Exploring the intersection with socio-economic, ability, LBGTQ, social competency development topics, all the while keeping in mind how uncomfortable it is to keep our focus on racism.

The Civil Rights Officer will work with key State partners including the Chief Performance Officer and the Commissioner of Human Resources on training design and the development of train-the-trainer opportunities – all the while insuring an overlap with training on Results-Based Accountability.

Providing adequate financial resources for training is essential. Presently our Collaborative is supporting Rep. Gonza’lez, Rep. Morris, and Sen. Balint in their efforts to provide training on these topics for all Vermont legislators. Members of the Community Equity Collaborative recently met with these legislators and the Snelling Center to discuss the CEC's vision for legislative training on racial disparities and implicit bias.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Racial Equity and Act 186 – Conditions of Well-being for *All* Vermonters Measuring Population Well-being

Vermont's Quality of Life Outcomes approved by Vermont Legislature S. 293 2014

1) Vermont has a prosperous economy. (2) Vermonters are healthy. (3) Vermont's environment is clean and sustainable. (4) Vermont's communities are safe and supportive. (5) Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported. (6) Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including: (A) Pregnant women and young people thrive. (B) Children are ready for school. (C) Children succeed in school. (D) Youth choose healthy behaviors. (E) Youth successfully transition to adulthood. (7) Vermont's elders and people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer. (8) Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government at the State and local levels.

All of these outcomes pertain to the well-being of Vermonters of color – population-level indicators can be written in more detail through using the racial disparities lens:

Examples to consider:

Outcome: Vermont has a prosperous economy.

Indicator: Number/percent of business owners who are people of color

Indicator: Number/percent of homeowners who are people of color

Outcome: Vermonters are healthy.

Indicator: Percent of Vermonters of color with health insurance.

Indicator: Percent of Vermonters of color with a medical home.

Outcome: Vermont's communities are safe and supportive.

Indicator: Percent of offenders who live in affordable housing immediately upon their release.

Indicator: Percent or rate of residents of color entering the corrections system.

Outcome: Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential, including:

A) Pregnant women and young people thrive.

Indicator: Percent of women of color who receive first trimester prenatal care

Indicator: Percent of children of color with health insurance

B) Children are ready for school.

Indicator: Percent of children of color ready for school in all five domains of healthy development

C) Children succeed in school.

Indicator: Percent of children of color below the basic level of 4th grade reading achievement under State standards

Indicator: Percent of children of color who drop out of school

Indicator: Percent of children of color who graduate from high school

D) Youth choose healthy behaviors.

Indicator: Rate of pregnancy for young women of color (15-17 & 18-19 years of age)

Indicator: Number and rate of minors of color who are under the supervision of the Dept. of Corrections.

E) Youth successfully transition to adulthood.

Indicator: Percent of high school seniors of color with plans for education, vocational training, or employment.

Indicator: Percent of graduating seniors of color who continue their education within 6 months of graduation

Outcome: Vermont's elders and people with disabilities and people with mental conditions live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer.

Indicator: Rate of confirmed reports of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults of color

Outcome: Vermont has open, effective, and inclusive government at the State and local levels.

Indicator: Number/percent of Vermonters of color elected to town, county and State office.

Racial Equity and Service System, Program Performance

Measuring Performance and Well-being of Clients

Performance measures are measures of how well public and private programs and agencies are working. The State of Vermont Chief Performance Officer has designated an employee in each agency of State government to be a performance accountability liaison to the General Assembly. Racial disparities performance measures need to be added to the present reporting requirements. Take into account quantity and quality vs. effort and effect in preparing performance measures. Each of the examples listed need to be expanded keeping this intersection in mind.

Examples to consider:

Service System: Economic Development

Performance Measure: Entrepreneur development education engages people of color

Performance Measure: Re-define job descriptions to emphasize competency over degrees

Performance Measure: Best practice in retention of people of color in work settings

Service System: Health Care

Performance Measure: Outreach to communities of color re: health insurance enrollment

Performance Measure: Outreach to communities of color re: securing a medical home

Performance Measure: Program that strengthens the academic proficiency and career development of students underrepresented in the health professions and prepares them for a successful application and matriculation to health professions schools.

Service System: Housing

Performance Measure: Number of landlords who will rent to ex-offenders.

Performance Measure: Percent of ex-offenders who have a circle of support and accountability upon release from prison.

Service System: Early Childhood and Education

Performance Measure: Early education available to children of color, including transportation

Performance Measure: Percent of administrators, teachers and support staff in each school who have received ongoing implicit bias education.

Performance Measure: Social competency development education (topics include implicit bias and privilege) is established as parallel to academic achievement in all public schools.

Performance Measure: Programs exist to help youth of color gain connections to the larger community, where they see themselves having a valuable role.

Performance Measure: Internship programs support graduating students of color to gain awareness of employment opportunities.

Service System: Aging

Performance Measure: All elderly advocates and ombudsmen have ongoing education related to implicit bias and racial disparities.

Service System: State Government

Performance Measure: Support programs identify, train, and encourage people of color to run for office at all levels of government, get elected, and serve their communities and our state.

