

# Over 150 MISSOURI Organizations Oppose Dangerous DEI Language in Budget

*We believe this language will result in wide-ranging consequences that would undermine lawmakers' economic and workforce priorities and urge you to remove it from the budget bills. The budget language would jeopardize licensing and accreditation of programs critical to both the wellbeing of Missourians and our state's economic competitiveness.*

April 2023

To Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

We are writing to share concerns about language the House of Representatives added to the Fiscal Year 2024 budget bills. Specifically, the language of concern would prohibit funding from being used for staffing, programs and vendors associated with diversity, equity and inclusion. **We believe this language will result in wide-ranging consequences that would undermine lawmakers' economic and workforce priorities and urge you to remove it from the budget bills.**

The broad language added to the bills raises questions about its practical application and how it would impact an array of services and programs that the state provides – including those critical to lawmakers' economic and workforce priorities.

The language reads:

*No funds shall be expended for staffing, vendors, consultants, or programs associated with "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion," or "Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging," or any other initiative which similarly promotes: 1) the preferential treatment of any individual or group of individuals based upon race, color, religion, sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, or ancestry; 2) the concept that disparities are necessarily tied to oppression; 3) collective guilt ideologies; 4) intersectional or divisive identity activism; or, 5) the limiting of freedom of conscience, thought, or speech. This does not prohibit the department from following federal and state employment and anti-discrimination laws.*

However, multiple programs and services offered in Missouri are either required by their accrediting bodies to incorporate the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion into their programs, or are specifically designed to ameliorate longstanding disparities in health and economic outcomes. **The budget language would jeopardize licensing and accreditation of programs critical to both the wellbeing of Missourians and our state's economic competitiveness.** For instance:

- Many nonprofit child welfare organizations, health and mental health service providers, and others with whom Missouri contracts to provide services are required through their national accrediting organizations to provide programming that incorporates diversity, equity and inclusion. *In addition to risks to accreditation, failure to meet those standards could result in the loss of federal funding as well as private funding from foundations.*
- Similarly, the national bodies accrediting professional education programs like those for teachers, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses and other health professionals are also required to incorporate training in diversity, equity and inclusion. Not only would the added budget language jeopardize the accreditation of these programs at Missouri's public colleges and universities, but the licensure of new professionals could be at risk.

Moreover, we recognize that Missourians continue to face deep disparities in their health and economic outcomes based on race. While white workers in Missouri earn an average of \$65,820 per year, Hispanic workers earn \$53,178 and Black workers earn just \$41,132 annually. While 33% of white Missourians have a college degree, only 21% of Black Missourians and 23% of Hispanic Missourians complete college. Missouri has one of the highest rates in the nation of premature death among Black residents, and Black moms in Missouri face a maternal mortality rate that is three times that of white moms. As long as these disparities exist in Missouri, we should not dampen efforts that would seek to understand and address them.

Unfortunately, the added budget language would likely conflict with several existing efforts, threatening:

- Targeted workforce and economic development programs,
- State contracts with vendors to provide services, including minority-owned businesses and other private companies,
- Department of Health programs targeted based on demographic factors, and
- Missouri Department of Public Safety's continuing education for law enforcement that includes education in racial profiling and implicit bias.

There are likely additional consequences related to state contracts with private companies, hiring and employment standards that are not mentioned here, but which could also have far-reaching implications.

**The added budget language would severely hamper Missouri's workforce development and economic competitiveness, and we again encourage you to remove the concerning language from all of the budget bills.**

**We oppose any efforts that would put language aimed at dampening diversity, equity and inclusion into state law.**

Respectfully,

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