



DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rep. Bishop Davidson,
Missouri House of Representatives

FROM: Leroy Wade
Interim Commissioner
Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development

CC: Members of the House Special Committee on Government Accountability

RE: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Correspondence

DATE: March 20, 2023

Rep. Davidson,

It has come to the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development's (MDHEWD) attention that you received and posted online (**Attachment 1**) a correspondence calling into question MDHEWD's professional development activities that are components of our values: accountability, teamwork, collaboration, and work-life balance. Specifically, the correspondent issues claims about MDHEWD's discussions around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (phraseology that has been around for decades); this memo addresses those patently false claims. Further, this memo provides background on internal and external initiatives that benefit all Missourians, which stem from MDHEWD's diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging discussions and overall efforts. MDHEWD also understands you wish to hold a discussion on the matter before the House Special Committee on Government Accountability; MDHEWD extends an invitation to have you or any committee member join one of these discussions when your schedule allows to experience these conversations firsthand.

MDHEWD's Meaning Behind the Terms Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

First, it is essential to understand what MDHEWD means when it says diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. While some entities may co-opt these terms to divide and create victimization, MDHEWD'S efforts are quite the opposite.

Simply put, to better serve each team member and **all** Missourians, we focus on

- recognizing and respecting each person's varied background (**diversity**),

- providing adequate resources and supports to meet the individual and at times, specialized needs of a person (ex. those with health conditions or impairments, veterans) (**equity**),
- ensuring all members have a voice in setting the direction of the department and its activities (**inclusion**), and
- becoming a place where team members feel connected and part of the larger mission (**belonging**).

This desire for openness and to serve is rooted in the DNA of the department. Creating a positive, inclusive environment is part of MDHEWD's Placemat initiative to create the "The Best Place to Work¹." As such, MDHEWD's leadership team welcomes the perspective shared by the correspondent. However, MDHEWD strongly disagrees with the assertions made and stresses the viewpoint of one does not represent the whole.

In a Facebook post shared on March 16, 2023 (**Attachment 3**), you state the following:

"And while words like "Diversity," "Equity," "Inclusion," and "Belonging," by themselves aren't bad things (and are typically good things depending on the context), we all know these words together are politically charged and politically motivated and have been twisted to attack the very real democratic virtues of civility, equality, and tolerance, which I STRONGLY support."

Based on the aforementioned statement, the department feels you are aligned with how we view these terms and how others can manipulate them.

Correspondent Claim 1: Lack of Transparency

- MDHEWD normally records "all-staff meetings" which are scheduled quarterly. However, all-staff meetings are also treated and communicated as required attendance for employees across the organization. DEIB office hours is a separate professional development opportunity extended to the entire staff, but is not mandatory in any way.
- As you are aware, all branches of government and all levels of government hold recorded and unrecorded meetings. It is unfair to label an unrecorded, optional meeting as opaque. In the instance of DEIB office hours, MDHEWD does not record this optional meeting to allow participants to speak comfortably and freely, aligning with MDHEWD's belief in the value of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Moreover, MDHEWD did not record DEIB office hours to ensure that employees do not feel that MDHEWD is monitoring attendance or planning to review/analyze meeting

¹ Please see **Attachment 2**. Attachment 2 is also included in DHEWD's annual budget book submission to the general assembly.

content. This is similar to the anonymity provided as part of the Quarterly Pulse Survey (QPS) administered to all state employees. The intent of DEIB office hours is to create an environment where participants feel heard, not potentially targeted or penalized based on comments shared, attendance, or nonattendance.

- To note, the correspondent states in a letter to you that they, “pasted a section of the DHEWD intranet DHEWD Staff Q&A, showing that a staff person, within DHEWD, on 12/5/2022 commented on this DHEWD meeting and asked if it would be recorded.” For transparency, here is the snapshot of that question and response.

I love that MDHEWD is having the DEIB Office Hour but will be unable to attend at the scheduled time. Will the DEIB Office Hours be recorded and made available on the intranet?	12/5/22	The DEI sessions will not be recorded in order to maintain a safe space so participants can speak freely and openly.
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Correspondent Claim 2: Ideology being promoted within state government

- Again, while DHEWD respects the correspondent’s opinion, their claim is patently false. In fact, the opposite is occurring. The intention of DEIB office hours is to show there is no ‘one ideology’ or belief shared among all staff members or Missourians; to be a successful organization, members must be aware recognize that everyone’s differences strengthen MDHEWD and allow MDHEWD to better serve each other (internally) and all Missourians (externally). For example, our first meeting discussing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging predominately centered on 12 Ground Rules for Better Strategic Meetings which is a constructive approach to creating a meeting environment where **all opinions** are welcomed and encouraged.



Internal

MDHEWD strives to create an atmosphere where all staff can share opinions and have a sense of belonging. In part, MDHEWD’s efforts stem from Quarterly Pulse Survey (QPS) results dating back to the MDHEWD’s creation (August 2019).

For the sake of transparency, below MDHEWD shares its survey results on several QPS questions. MDHEWD’s QPS results show an array of responses relating to how MDHEWD creates a meaningful and inviting environment for team members. With the 2019 merger and creation of MDHEWD, the pandemic, and recent leadership changes, DHEWD experienced multiple events affecting team morale and sense of belonging.

QPS Question	% Agree/Often #4 Sep 2019	% Agree/Often #7 Oct 2020	% Agree/Often #9 Apr 2021	% Agree/Often #11 Oct 2021	% Agree/Often #13 May 2022	% Agree/Often #15 Nov 2022
Managers create a sense of belonging to the organization	44%	63%	68%	71%	67%	62%
The organization effectively responds to the changing needs of citizens, clients, business partners, and other stakeholders	47%	74%	73%	71%	72%	63%
My team has the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to provide excellent citizen/customer service				85%	83%	80%
Managers in the organization provide praise, thanks, or other forms of recognition	38%	60%	68%	66%	63%	57%
Senior leaders clearly communicate a set of values that are personally meaningful to employees	40%	53%	59%	60%	60%	55%
The organization's employees are highly motivated	43%	59%	61%	60%	62%	56%

QPS Question	% Agree/Often #5 Dec 2019	% Agree/Often #6 July 2020	% Agree/Often #8 Jan 2021	% Agree/Often #10 Jul 2021	% Agree/Often #12 Feb 2022	% Agree/Often #14 July 2022	% Agree/Often #16 Feb 2023
I understand how I contribute to my organization's vision	66%	77%	78%	89%	82%	83%	86%
Managers align the organization's goals with the personal goals of employees	35%	46%	51%	62%	57%	58%	56%
Leaders in the organization (including my supervisor) role model the values of the organization	59%	59%	70%	76%	74%	74%	76%
Leaders in the organization (including my supervisor) proactively share important information with employees	49%	69%	69%	74%	66%	66%	70%
Leaders in the organization (including my supervisor) respond to employee feedback	49%	58%	67%	69%	57%	62%	65%
The organization's vision is clearly communicated throughout the organization	51%	64%	75%	77%	78%	74%	74%
Leaders in the organization (including my supervisor) demonstrate concern for the welfare of employees	54%		73%	72%	66%	65%	71%
Leaders in the organization (including my supervisor) create a sense of teamwork and mutual support throughout the organization	52%		68%	71%	67%	67%	70%
The organization values a variety of ideas and opinions, even if there is disagreement about those ideas and opinions.				61%	56%	57%	61%
I feel as if I belong at this organization.				80%	72%	74%	74%

MDHEWD's recent QPS results indicate significant strides in seeking to build a culture that focuses on organizational health, performance, and capability building, which aligns with the State of Missouri's goal to be as good as any organization [outside of state government].

Moreover, like other governmental entities the QPS results indicate that more work is necessary and MDHEWD must continue its efforts to maintain the momentum of our recent successes (e.g. I feel as if I belong at this organization).

A need to find multiple, creative ways to address negative or decreasing results led to these voluntary, monthly discussions. Again, MDHEWD emphatically believes that acknowledging diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are among its strengths and not one viewpoint is superior to another. MDHEWD strives to treat all employees and their values equally. DEIB office hours simply create awareness so team members can more freely and respectfully interact with other staff and make informed, strategic decisions to benefit MDHEWD and the citizens of Missouri. MDHEWD built DEIB office hours on a foundation provided as **Attachment 3**—a presentation to senior leadership and directors demonstrating that MDHEWD believes it will create the “Best Place to Work.” Specifically, **Attachment 4** includes a presentation on “belonging” from March 2022.

Our past sessions have included the following topics. These discussions featured a diverse group of speakers, primarily MDHEWD team members, who objectively shared their culture and heritage with colleagues. MDHEWD receives positive responses from these conversations which include, for example, how our Jewish employees who use PTO because there are no State holidays that recognize the two holiest days of their calendar, finally feel respected and recognized.

- November 14, 2022: Discuss the history of terms from different cultures and locations
- December 12, 2022: Discuss holidays/events of the month, to include Jewish, Christian, Canadian, and Central American celebrations.
- January 9, 2023: Discuss events of the month, to include Birth Defects Awareness and World Braille Day. Along with defining and discussing different types of bias.
- February 21, 2023: Discuss events of the month, to include Black History and Youth Leadership month. Including types and examples of microaggressions.
- March 13, 2023: Discuss events of the month, to include Ramadan and Women’s History month. Along with discussion of belonging in the workplace.

MDHEWD hopes this content explanation provides a sense of what it is striving to accomplish with DEIB office hours.

External

In summer 2021, MDHEWD kicked off its public strategic planning process. The primary focus of the strategic planning process was to develop a mission statement, big goals, and strategies. This focus meant conducting an environmental scan of Missouri—analyzing of strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for increasing attainment and labor force participation. When reviewing the results and breakdown of citizen’s educational credentials and participants in the labor force, there are clear gaps among race, location, and unique, identifiable characteristics in Missouri.

In order for the state to reach higher educational attainment and labor force participation goals, it must place a better focus on hard-to-reach populations. To reach marginalized populations, a better understanding of the hardships and barriers they may experience is imperative. The discussions and best practices shared and envisioned in these diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging sessions are to help better position team members to meet those needs to create a better Missouri.

For example, even before DEIB office hours, MDHEWD’s definition and focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging has and will continue to inform critical strategic areas of focus. Within the Office of Workforce Development, our diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts include an elevated focus on resources for veterans and those with disabilities. With this frame of reference in mind, these are the existing efforts in place that fall under our diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging umbrella:

Resources for Veterans:

- **Matching of military experience to civilian jobs**
- **Identify education and training opportunities**
- **Assessments to determine strengths, interests, and abilities**
- **Intensive career services to include targeted resumes, interview workshops, job development and referrals to community partners to aid in overcoming barriers to employment**
- **Priority of Service for all service members and their spouses**
- **Missouri Hero Connect and Career Skills Program**
- **Assistance in obtaining documents such as DD214**

Resources for those with disabilities:

- **Access for all job seekers, including people with disabilities, to our job center services**
- **Assistive technology in our job centers**
- **Arrange and provide interpreter services for those who request them**
- **Partner with other agencies and organizations so we can include people with disabilities in our programs, including apprenticeships**

- **Access to pre-apprenticeship programs for individuals who need this program leading to Registered Apprenticeships**
- **Participate in projects developed by other agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation's progressive employment program, so that we ensure that they can utilize job center services**

Supporting veterans and individuals with disabilities are just two examples of how a holistic look at diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging guides department decision-making and improves the delivery of services to Missouri citizens.

In summary, MDHEWD hopes this document provides clarity around what it means by diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Additionally, MDHEWD hopes this memo expresses the "why" behind MDHEWD's strategic efforts to improve employee satisfaction and overall value to Missouri and its citizens. MDHEWD hopes this document drives positive internal discussions and leads to external activities that benefit Missourians.

Attachment 1: Posted Letter from Correspondent

Attachment 2: MDHEWD 2022 - 2023 Placemat

Attachment 3: Representative Davidson Initial Thoughts Posted on March 16, 2023

Attachment 4: MDHEWD Presentation on Belonging

Attachment 1: Posted Letter from Correspondent

Letter of Concern
Saturday, March 11, 2023 2:12 PM

Representative Bishop Davidson
MO House of Representatives
201 West Capital Ave, Room 201-CA
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Representative Davidson,

I am writing to draw your attention to a concerning development infiltrating Missouri State government agencies. I am an employee of the Division of Higher Education and Workforce Development. I am writing anonymously to avoid potential repercussions.

Effective December 12, 2022, there have been voluntary DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) all-staff meetings held monthly via Zoom. Subsequent meetings have been held on January 9, 2023, February 21, 2023 and March 13, 2023. They tentatively are scheduled the second Monday of every month from 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. All-staff meetings are normally recorded which allows for transparency. These DEIB meetings are not recorded. The reason given is "to maintain a safe space so participants can speak freely NOT openly." I do NOT believe that is accurate. When logging into all-staff meetings through work computers, the participants identity is visible by name. The camera can be turned off, however. I believe it is so there will be no documented record of these meetings occurring on state paid time. This is a lack of transparency.

I am deeply concerned about this ideology being promoted within state government agencies. My opinion is this is a WOKE agenda and ultimately results in the potential development of "word and thought police." It also CREATES greater Division, Victimization and Entitlement mentalities. I believe DEIB is Destructive in nature and creates, and even encourages, people to be "offended." ENOUGH is ENOUGH!

I BELIEVE Woke has NO PLACE in State government agencies and needs to be addressed. Payroll tax dollars should not be used to support this ideology and agenda.


I am attaching a page that includes the Zoom link and monthly timeframe information. I also pasted a section of the DHEWD Intranet DHEWD Staff Q & A, showing that a staff person, within DHEWD, on 12/5/22 commented on this DHEWD meeting and asked if it would be recorded. You can also see the DHEWD Management response.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

👍🤔 14 5 comments 6 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Attachment 2: MDHEWD 2022 - 2023 Placemat

 DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT					2022-2023 PLACEMAT			
ASPIRATION	EVERY MISSOURIAN EMPOWERED WITH THE SKILLS AND EDUCATION NEEDED FOR SUCCESS.							
THEMES	ACCESS	SUCCESS	AFFORDABILITY	BEST PLACE TO WORK				
INITIATIVES	<i>Removing barriers to enrollment and employment</i>	<i>Supporting learners and workers through a holistic lens</i>	<i>Identifying resources and creating opportunities</i>	<i>Continuous improvement in culture and process</i>				
<p>OP&S.1 Help students make informed decisions with Students' Right to Know resources</p> <p>OWD.1 Expand opportunities for youth through partnership programs</p> <p>OC&O.1 Promote pathways showcasing value of postsecondary education and its role in workforce development</p> <p>OPP.1 Develop and implement adult learner network</p> <p>OPP.2 Coordinate Summer Bridge Community of Action training</p> <p>CO.6 Coordinate Higher Education Study</p> <p>OWD.6 Develop MO Reentry Connect program</p>	<p>OWD.2 Expand Job Center Connect services with infrastructure, awareness, and performance redesign</p> <p>OWD.3 Expand Missouri Apprentice Ready program</p> <p>OWD.4 Expand access to Veteran resources through MO Veterans Connect</p> <p>OPP.3 Expand mental health resources to students</p> <p>OC&O.2 Spotlight DHEWD partners whose work drives progress toward big goals</p> <p>OWD.5 Modernize workforce facilities to enhance citizen service through MO Workforce Connect</p>	<p>Ops.1 Restructure dual credit/dual enrollment program to concentrate educational opportunities to targeted populations</p> <p>OPP.3 Expand number of campuses with social services</p> <p>CO.1 Advocate for legislative support that allow the department to drive progress toward big goals</p> <p>Ops.2 Restructure the Fast Track grant by removing the loan component and expanding the number and type of training opportunities</p>	<p>CO. 2 Operationalize DHEWD values and strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in the department</p> <p>CO.3 Coordinate the review and update of the Rewards and Recognition playbook for performance</p> <p>CO.4 Leverage work continuity plan with updated job descriptions that link to values and principles and establish mentor program</p> <p>CO.5 Reestablish the Fun Committee to organize department events throughout the year</p>					

Updated 07/15/2022

Attachment 3: Representative Davidson Initial Thoughts Posted on March 16, 2023


 My initial thoughts:

Initially, I'm most upset about the lack of transparency—especially when it comes to an All-Staff meeting of an Agency.

I'm also concerned about the motive of these meetings. Government agencies filled with non-elected bureaucrats should not be propagating political agendas. And while words like "Diversity," "Equity," "Inclusion," and "Belonging," by themselves aren't bad things (and are typically good things depending on the context), we all know these words together are politically charged and politically motivated and have been twisted to attack the very real democratic virtues of civility, equality, and tolerance, which I STRONGLY support.

These meetings are happening on the taxpayer's dime. We, the people, deserve to know what goes on in them and should be deciding on whether or not they go on at all.

Attachment 4: MDHEWD Presentation on Belonging




DEPARTMENT OF
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Focus on Values + Belonging

- Belonging is a human need, but 40% of employees say they feel alone at work
- Post-pandemic employees are seeking a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in their work now more than ever before

<https://hbr.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work#:~:text=Belonging%20is%20good%20for%20business,75%25%20reduction%20in%20sick%20days>




DEPARTMENT OF
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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Focus on Values – Accountability + Belonging

- Engaged employees practice **accountability** by:
 - Working hard
 - Solving problems
 - Taking on responsibilities
- Only 20% of employees who report a lack of sense of belonging are engaged at work
- Solutions
 - Individuals: Recognize your own beliefs to determine what makes you feel like you're on the outside
 - Organizations: Engage the whole employee and the whole team

[Qualtrics-2021-Employee-Experience-Trends.pdf](#)

Attachment 4 (cont.): MDHEWD Presentation on Belonging



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Focus on Values – Teamwork/Collaboration + Belonging

- Employees who lack of sense of belonging are more likely to give less effort to team and/or collaborative work
- Employees who feel they belong are more likely to work with a team, share ideas, and work toward a goal
- Solutions
 - Individuals: Accept yourself and others
 - Organizations: Create a space for mentorship and allyship

<https://five.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work#:~:text=Belonging%20is%20good%20for%20business,75%25%20reduction%20in%20sick%20days>
<https://www.betterup.com/blog/belonging>