

HCS HBs 2619, 2365, 2448 & 2569 -- EXPENDITURES BY STATE
DEPARTMENTS

SPONSOR: Smith (163)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on General Laws by a vote of 12 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Regulatory Oversight by a vote of 6 to 3.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2619.

This bill prohibits funds from any State department being used for intradepartmental programs, staffing, or initiatives related to "diversity, equity, and inclusion" or similar initiatives that promote preferential treatment based on certain characteristics, concepts such as oppression as the sole cause of disparities, collective guilt ideologies, intersectional or divisive identity activism, and the limiting of freedom of conscience, thought, or speech.

This bill also specifies that State departments are not prohibited from following Federal and State employment and antidiscrimination laws or complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This bill prohibits State departments from mandating, requiring, or incentivizing private sector employers to implement "diversity, equity, and inclusion" programs or initiatives as a condition for receiving a State contract.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that deployment of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives promotes the idea that to address past discrimination, we must employ present discrimination. However, using State resources and insinuating that it is ever appropriate to use race discriminatory practices to make up for past wrongs flies directly in the face of the Constitution. State employees should not be forced into engaging with DEI and taxpayer dollars should not be used for this discriminatory practice. A very loud, but small, segment of society is doing what they can to drive a narrative that attacks the very root of western ideals. When you use terms, such as diversity, without telling the general population what you are using those terms for, you do the opposite of inclusion, you further divide. Disparity between two or more groups creates oppression which pushes people into tribal camps

resulting in breeding racist connotations. Proponents further state that DEI programs are admirable but do not work. These programs often do the opposite of what they claim to do. Rather than increase minority representation, there is less minority representation and those that undergo diversity training don't actually change their views or address diversity issues. Hiring programs should focus on the merit of the applicant, rather than the applicant's race or gender. To promote one preferred group over another creates resentment toward that preferred group, thus creating an us versus them mentality.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Smith; Cicero Action, Opportunity Solutions Project; and Raheem J. Williams, Do No Harm.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that diversity within the work place allows for a more diverse approach to complex problems. People from different backgrounds can approach issues in different ways. Different approaches often ensure teams arrive at a solution more quickly than a team that has only one way of looking at a problem. DEI programs provide this necessary diversity within the work place. Opponents also say that women and minority groups often don't have the same access to opportunities that white males do. DEI is a way for underserved communities to get opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have access to. Minorities are already under represented in many professions. Removing DEI programs would only further decrease the number of minorities in many professional fields. Everyone is born with some kind of prejudice. DEI is important to teach professionals about biases and may help certain professionals learn about a bias they may have that they were not aware of.

Testifying in person against the bill were Abortion Action Missouri (Formerly Pro Choice Missouri); Missouri Family Health Council; Missouri Budget Project; Missouri Speech-Language and Hearing Association (MSHA); Tricia McGhee, Revolucion Educativa; Advocates of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region & Southwest Missouri; National Association of Social Work-Missouri Chapter; Dava-Leigh Brush, Missouri Equity Education Partnership Action; Heather Fleming; American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, Public Health Excellence; May Hall; Michael Walk; Health Forward Foundation; Rebecca Nowlin, Aging Best and Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging; American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri; and the Missouri State Conference NAACP.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.