

Minneapolis City Council approves strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in employment

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The Minneapolis City Council approved a resolution supporting equity in employment along with a series of actions to eliminate the racial and ethnic disparities in employment in Minneapolis and the entire region.

The Minneapolis–Saint Paul metro region has among the highest employment disparities in the country, with African Americans 3.3 times more likely to be unemployed as whites in the Twin Cities.

“I am proud that we are taking this important step in our ongoing efforts to address the real, although often hidden, impacts of our long history of racism and discrimination,” said Council Member Cam Gordon, co-author of the resolution. “While government cannot solve this problem alone, now we are more clearly committed to lead by example, to develop better tools and practices that can be used by others, and to join more purposefully with our regional partners to end the legacy of institutionalized racism that continues to plague us, and create a more economically just city for everyone.”

City Council Member Don Samuels, who also co-authored the resolution, said its passing demonstrates the city’s commitment to all of its citizens.

“We are reaffirming our commitment to being a city where everyone can thrive economically and where race will no longer predict an individual’s level of educational attainment, likelihood of going to prison, life expectancy, income or employment status,” said Samuels.

Minneapolis Mayor, R.T. Rybak said the resolution is an extension of programs already in place to close the economic gap in the region.

“With programs like STEP-UP and One Minneapolis, we’ve created innovative programs aimed at eliminating the racial employment gap in Minneapolis, but much more needs to be done,” said Mayor R.T. Rybak. “With (passing the resolution), we are supporting and encouraging consistent, applied efforts by employers in Minneapolis and across the region to hire, retain and promote more people of color.”

According to the supporters of the resolution, the approved actions will help eliminate the disparities in employment in Minneapolis and the region.

Rybak and others says addressing racial disparities in employment has long been a priority of the city. In 2008, the city established a steering committee specifically designed to identify and implement tangible steps that could be taken to address employment disparity. In December of last year, Mayor Rybak and the City Council adopted the 2012 budget that funds the One Minneapolis initiative, and in January the Council established key benchmarks that make progress toward eliminating the disparities gap, with a goal of reducing the unemployment gap by 25 percent by 2016.

One of the most successful aspects of One Minneapolis is the RENEW initiative. Initially funded by economic-recovery dollars, RENEW trains and places people who have faced challenges finding employment in green-economy jobs. To date, close to 500 people have been trained

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through RENEW, and two-thirds have been placed in green jobs.

Since the STEP-UP program started in 2004, almost 16,000 Minneapolis young people have been placed in summer jobs with many of the city's companies and nonprofits. More than 85 percent of STEP-UP participants have been children of color. This year the city began a new leadership development program called Urban Scholars that introduces college students from diverse backgrounds to careers in the public sector. Eight students completed the program, three of whom were STEP-UP interns. Supporters say this program creates a pipeline of experienced professionals for the public sector which is critical in light of the number of people positioned to retire from city government in the next four years and to increasing diversity in the city.