

Rhode Island Department of Health

Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee

Meeting

Thursday, November 21, 2007

In attendance: Cheryl LeClair, Carrie Bridges, Janice Fontes, Anna Sullivan, Shashi Mehta, Rilwan Feyisitan, Edward D'Arezzo, and Dhitinut Ratnapradipa.

Call for Additional Agenda Items

There was not a call for additional items to be included on the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

The group reviewed the draft minutes from the November 8, 2007 meeting. The group approved the minutes with no changes noted. Cheryl noted that she would send an electronic copy of the finalized minutes to the members and post them on the Open Meetings website when she is able to do so since this meeting occurred when the Secretary of State's (SOS's) website was down. She noted that the SOS's Office will notify everyone in the state who was affected by this problem when they can post the minutes on their website.

Development of EEO Committee Work Plan & Priorities

Carrie noted that the recent layoffs that occurred within the state and the Department on November 15 forces the EEO Committee to look at its draft work plan and priorities with new eyes. Most notably, categorizing “recruitment” as a priority focus area for EEO efforts no longer makes as much sense as it did before the layoffs.

Carrie asked Ed to help the group understand what the recent layoffs mean with respect to the EEO Committee’s work. Ed noted that it has only been within the past ten years that that the Department and the state have seen a significant increase in the diversity of its work force. This means that, in general, state employees who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group are more likely to have been hired more recently. As a result, any layoffs in the state’s seniority-based system would most likely have a disproportionate impact on minority employees.

Ed also noted that, for the most part, the state has not given examinations since the early 1990s. As a result, the majority of the Department’s employees (with the exception of licensed staff) have temporary status. Ed also noted that the state abolished statutory protection status for employees hired in 1996 or later. Ed noted that the state’s priority hiring list for state employees who are laid off applies to classified employees who have permanent status in accordance with Section 36-4-23 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

Carrie asked Ed if he would provide the EEO Committee with information regarding the recently laid-off positions by race, ethnicity, gender, age (e.g. >40 years), and job status (e.g. statutory, permanent, temporary, or probationary). Ed agreed to do so.

The group next heard from departing EEO Committee at-large member, Shashi Mehta, who shared some of the personal experiences that he has had working for the Department and stressed the need for transparency in and commitment to the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.

The group used the remaining time to review changes made to the draft work plan for the EEO Committee from the previous meeting (November 8, 2008). These changes include the following: Ana Novais' name was replaced with Anna Sullivan's name (corrects a technical error), Strategy 1.6 (seek out innovative recruitment strategies) was reclassified as not being a priority at this time (due to the state budget situation), Strategy 2.2 (increase professional development opportunities) was reclassified as being a priority (reflects emphasis on addressing the needs of existing employees during these difficult times), and Rilwan's name was added to Strategy 2.5 (Hear and respond to relevant employee concerns and complaints regarding employment) to reflect his interest in working on this focus area.

It was noted that the group needs information from Ed D'Arezzo with

respect to several areas (as noted on the draft work plan) in order to finalize its priorities and key strategies. Cheryl agreed to follow-up with Ed.

Next Meeting

The next meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, December 19, 2007, from 9:30 am – 10:30 am, in HEALTH's Conference Room 302. The members were reminded that the EEO Committee has articulated a goal to increase and diversify internship positions at HEALTH. Knowing that both Bob Marshall and Rosa Anderson work on training and internship efforts within the Department, they will be invited to this next meeting to:

- *Share what they are doing related to these efforts,**
- *Join us in a discussion about how the EEO can contribute to these efforts, and**
- *Make recommendations about how to best target our joint energies and maximize opportunities.**

Cheryl noted that she would work to set up a new schedule of EEO Committee meetings for 2008.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carrie Bridges

Cheryl LeClair

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