

To: Committee on State, Local Government and Veterans, Minnesota Senate

From: Anonymous State Employee

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Statement on Discriminatory Practices at Minnesota Veterans Home

As a person of color in the State Service, I am encouraged by the commitment of Minnesota State Government to Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, but it must go beyond the theory. In fact, I joined Minnesota Veterans Home after years in leadership positions in the private sector excited about the diverse staff population, only to find out that Blacks and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are only 'allowed' to hold lower-level positions at the Vets home, no matter their education and experience level.

There is indeed a systemic 'roadblock' to prevent their career progression beyond mid-level. I experienced it personally and when I complained to people around me, they were quick to advise that I "keep quiet" and endure it for fear of 'severe retaliation'. Some of the 'strongest' and smartest healthcare professionals we have are BIPOC and top leaders acknowledged, praised and encouraged them openly but when they apply for higher positions, they 'fall short'. One of the tools of this discriminatory system is the scored interview system which does not give room for wholistic evaluation of the candidate and can be easily exploited for nepotism in hiring. Just like the standardized testing for college admissions which has a racist beginning and kept students of color from college admission opportunities, BIPOC candidates at the Veterans Home do not receive authentic assessment of their ability and get bypassed for less qualified candidates that are white. Of course, the people that perpetuate this system always have documented evidence (interview transcripts and scores) to defend their practice.

Senators, if you visit the Minnesota Veterans Home Minneapolis you will encounter men and women providing great cares and happy veterans appreciative of the great quality of care from staff, but the BIPOC population are only 'suffering and smiling', knowing that in most cases they cannot aspire for a status fitting of their education and experience. Success should depend on *what you know*, not *whom you know*. Staff also do not feel protected when there is no one that looks like them at the highest level where decisions regarding their present and future are made.

Final Suggestions:

If an internal candidate aspires to a position, interview questions is a fair assessment but it should be made wholistic by considering their existing performance review, feedback from their team (intra and inter-disciplinary) and views of their residents.

Since this is a system issue, no one individual is responsible, and change cannot be made by targeting one individual. There must be a change of the *status quo*. The culture of inequality and one that allows nepotism to thrive must be uprooted. Organizational culture assessment is a great place to start and placing a structure in place to protect the minority would make the Veteran's Home and Minnesota State service more just, fair, and equitable.