

Council on Black Minnesotans

2015 Legislative Report Final

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Caucus At The Capitol



COBM in the News

Minnesota lawmakers call for ethnic councils to be restructured
By Frederick Melo **Pioneer Press**
03/18/2015

What is the future of the Council on Black Minnesotans?
By: **TC Daily Planet** ISAAC PETERSON | April 15, 2015

Our View: Are Minnesota's civil rights laws enforced?
Rochester Post Bulletin
April 24, 2015

Our View: Ethnic councils too important to scrap
By **Duluth News Tribune** on May 12, 2015

Council on Black Minnesotans faces retaliation for reporting on inequities
By: EDWARD MCDONALD
Spokesman Recorder | April 18, 2015

The Council on Black Minnesotans is calling for an external audit to gauge compliance on three statutes [procurement](#), [affirmative action](#) and [human rights](#)

2015 Legislative Final Report

Caucus at the Capitol

During the legislative session COBM board, staff, constituency and allies worked with legislative representatives from throughout the state to advance our community driven recommendations that ensure Minnesotans of African Heritage participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social and economic resources, policies and procedures of the State of Minnesota as required in our enabling statute 3.9225.

To ensure Minnesotans of African Heritage engage the legislative process to advance their ideas, COBM employed a civic engagement initiative call **Caucus at the Capitol**. These weekly gatherings allowed our constituency to gather at the capitol and be briefed on the status of their legislation, receive training in the legislative process and spend the day meeting with legislators or attend hearings to promote their legislation. The caucuses kicked off with our annual day on the hill where some 200 residents from around the state gathered to hear from speakers and meet with legislators to gain support for their recommendations.



The aim of the COBM's community driven legislation is to make equal access to opportunities a practice, create innovative policies and administrative approaches that eradicate all forms of disparities and ensure human/civil rights enforcement. If these pillars are achieved, the state of Minnesota will employ the cultural agility it needs to be effective with its performance to benefits all its investors.

Cultural agility is the employment of individuals and entities with cultural and linguistic competence to diversify an institution's professional base so congruent behaviors, attitudes, and

policies can come together that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations, diverse culture communities and to reduce institutional isms. 'Culture' refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that includes the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. 'Competence' implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual and an organization within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by consumers and their communities.

When a community and its institutions commit to cultural agility it builds a marketplace that practice Allophilia. Allophilia is having a positive attitude for a group that is not one's own.

We open the legislative session by issuing a report on the state of Minnesota's affirmative action and human rights enforcement as required in our enabling statute. These Acts (Human Rights MN 363,363A), the Procurement (MN 16C) and the Affirmative Action Act (MN 43A)) if administered properly they facilitate cultural agility in state government operations and the market place.

The underlining principles for the passage of these acts is all able residents contribute to Minnesota's operational cost and if they are willing, able and available should be afforded equal access and opportunity to fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social and economic resources, policies and procedures of the State of Minnesota. Our analysis found noncompliance with all the acts.



COBM believes as a result of noncompliance with the administrative application of these acts Minnesota was ranked in the 24/7 Wall Street Journal Report; "The 10 worst states for Black Americans", and the second worst place in the country for Black Americans.

The report indicates a typical black household in Minnesota earned less than half the median income of white households in 2013, well below the 62.3% nationwide. Low incomes among the

Black population are likely due in part to a high unemployment rate. While 15% of Black workers in the state were unemployed in 2013, fewer than 5% of the total workforce did not have a job, a gap nearly twice as large as the national gap. High unemployment rates tend to lead to higher rates of people without health insurance, as a majority of Americans receive health insurance through their employers. While only 6.9% of White residents did not have health insurance in 2013, nearly 33% of Blacks were uninsured. Additionally, Black Minnesotan households were three times less likely than White households to own their homes, a rate nearly twice as high as the rest of the nation. Across the country, Black Americans were also more likely to be disenfranchised as a result of the criminal justice system. In 2013, more than 7% of Minnesota's Black population was barred from voting as a result of felony convictions or imprisonment.

The COBM proposed legislation on the next pages represent our final report on the 2015 legislative session. The legislative session closed Monday, May 18, 2015. The governor vetoed several pieces of legislation and a special session was convened. We commented on the vetoed legislation if it intersected with our legislation.

We thank all of you that helped develop the legislative proposals, attended the Day on the Hill and the weekly caucuses at the capitol, testified at hearings and met with legislators and administrators. We achieved a lot of direct and indirect legislative success. The next round of community planning will begin in earnest in September.



❖ SUMMARY OF OUR INITIAL HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION

The COBM Human Rights Legislation achieves the following:

1. Lifts the cap on the priority duties of the commissioner of human rights so all 19 duties can be performed,
2. Operate regional offices in Rochester, Duluth and Saint Cloud, and
3. Establish a department within the Office of the State Auditor to:
 - Ensure that all duties specified in section 363A.06 are dealt with as a priority;
 - Implement audit and review procedures for state agencies and contractors to follow to comply with applicable provisions in chapters 16C and 43A and section 363A.06;
 - Conduct affirmative action and human rights impact analysis on all executive orders to be issued and propose legislation needed;
 - Review and approve all state contract procurement services under chapter 16C for compliance with chapter 363A;
 - Establish benchmarks for meeting equal opportunity requirements in contracting; and
 - Establish good faith benchmarks for equal opportunity compliance in subcontracting.

The state auditor shall report to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over human rights on the findings of the audit by January 15, 2016, and annually thereafter. The report shall be issued to the governor and the public at large through the state auditor's Web site.

4. Establish a committee to study the process of implementing the United Nation's International Covenant to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination and address issues relating to fair housing discrimination and restoration of rights to ex-offenders.

Where the legislation stood at mid-session

House File 1364 and Senate File 889: A bill for an act relating to **human rights**; providing compliance oversight for human rights claims; appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2014, section 363A.06, Subdivision 1; proposed a new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 6. **This bill was introduced by Representatives Hornstein, Clark, Dehn, Ward and Knoblach and Senators Eaton, Sparks, Dibble, Carlson and Pederson.** It was referred to the House Civil Law and Data Practices - Committee **Chair: Peggy Scott (GOP)** and Senate Judiciary Committee **Chair: Ron Latz (DFL)**

The final language

This bill did not receive a hearing in either the House or the Senate. At mid-session, COBM staff met with the Commissioner of Human Rights who agreed to support us if the COBM could convince the legislature to add funds to the department budget for additional offices in St. Cloud, Duluth, Rochester and Mankato. However, when staff met with several legislators, we were told that there would be no support for any other offices, except perhaps St. Cloud because the 'community' was not in support of adding additional human rights offices. Staff continued to work toward passage of funds for additional offices until the very last week of the Legislative session. The legislature decided to only fund the St. Cloud office at \$80,000 per year. The final budget does not contain funds for any other offices out state.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

We had residents from the cities of Saint Cloud, Saint Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth and Rochester participated in several caucus sessions and lobbying activities at the capitol. We also received support from a University of Minnesota intern and several metro area residents. We also conducted several action alerts using COBM Facebook page and email contacts to mobilize constituency make contact with legislators. We were able to gain support from the NAACP with trying to advance the legislation. The NAACP held a press conference at the capitol to bring attention to the issue after being briefed during one of the caucus sessions. Several board members attended a briefing session with the governor's policy staff where the legislation was highlighted. We also received letters of support from the Mayors of Saint Cloud, Rochester and Duluth. The Duluth News Tribune and Rochester Post wrote editorials highlighting the need to strengthen human rights enforcement and the need to audit compliance with the administrative application of the aforementioned acts.

Our View: Are Minnesota's civil rights laws enforced? *Rochester Post Bulletin* April 24, 2015

The Council on Black Minnesotans is calling for an external audit to gauge compliance on three statutes [procurement](#), [affirmative action](#) and [human rights](#)

❖ SUMMARY OF OUR INITIAL URBAN AGRICULTURE LEGISLATION

MN.GOV/COBM

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Our two bills to expand Urban Agriculture, **HF2110 & HF2111**, are being heard in the House Agriculture Policy Committee. Join us at the hearing to show your support of these two community developed solutions!

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26TH AT 8:15AM | IN ROOM 5 OF THE STATE OFFICE BUILDING

The COBM Urban Agriculture Bill Legislation achieves the following:

- Requires cities with 60,000 or more residents to create agriculture development zones when conducting land use planning.
- Make the League of Minnesota Cities a source for model urban agriculture ordinances.
- Requires the Department of Agriculture to make grants and loans available for urban agriculture activities in cities with populations of 60,000 or more residents.
- Requires The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture to establish a framework for participatory problem-solving in local communities throughout rural and urban Minnesota that will strengthen the connection between local communities, identified food deserts, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, and deficient affordable fresh and organic food access zones in urban communities, regions, and the land-grant university; invest research, education, and outreach dollars to meet agreed- upon local and regional needs; and foster the development of integrated agricultural systems that are profitable, enhance environmental quality, and support healthy rural and urban communities

Where the legislation stood at mid-session

Urban Agriculture: A bill for an act relating to state government; adding **urban agriculture development zones** in land use planning; relating to sustainable agriculture; modifying certain programs and grants. This bill was initially sponsored by Representatives Clark, Hamilton, Dehn, Hornstein, Slocum, Kahn, Allen, Bly, and Carlson and Senators Hawj, Pappas, Hayden, Nelson and Dahms. The bill was referred to House Agriculture Policy - Committee Chair: Paul Anderson (GOP) and State and Local Government Committee - Chair: Patricia Torres Ray (DFL) and Jobs, Agriculture and Rural Development Committee Chair: Dan Sparks (DFL)

The final language

This bill received a hearing in both chambers. The conference committee did not adopt the language we requested nor did they provide funding. The language that passed requires the Commissioner of Agriculture to convene interested stakeholders and develop a proposal to promote urban agriculture in Minnesota cities and report those meetings to the Agriculture related Legislative committees by Jan 2016. It also requires the commissioner to propose legislation that newly and more accurately defines urban agriculture. The bill is part of the conference committee omnibus bill that was vetoed by the governor and will be discussed during the special session. At the end of the special session the bill language remained as amended.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

Representative Karen Clark organized a caucus of 20 + individuals after COBM's initial caucus gathering to assist in the passing of this legislation. The Caucus members were very active lobbying legislators, testifying at the various hearings and responding to action alerts to help keep the bill alive until the end of the session. They are experienced and ready to engage the next session March 2016.

❖ SUMMARY OF OUR INITIAL ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION

The COBM African Heritage, Cultural and Arts Preservation and Expansion Legislation Continues collaborations between the Minnesota Humanities Center and the Council on Black Minnesotans to administer a **\$6,000,000** state wide legacy grant program that will:

- Provide direct grants and funding for African Heritage Artists
- Provide technical assistance support for African Heritage Artist Organizations
- Provide services for archiving the legacy of African Heritage Arts in Minnesota
- Provide for expanding the understanding of Minnesotans of African Heritage Culture to foster improved cultural relations in Minnesota.



Where the legislation stood at mid-session

House File 1417 and Senate File 1037 **Arts and Cultural Heritage**: A bill for an act relating to **arts and cultural heritage**; appropriating money for African culture, heritage and arts grants through the Minnesota Humanities Center. **This bill was initially sponsored by Representatives Kahn, Erin Murphy, Hornstein, Freiberg, Ward and Slocum and Senators Metzen, Gazelka,**

Kent, Dahle, and Dahms. The legislation was referred to Legacy Funding Finance - Committee Chair: Dean Urdahl (GOP) and Senate Finance Committee - Chair: Richard Cohen (DFL)

The final language

This bill received a Senate committee hearing in the Legacy Funding Finance Committee, but did not receive a hearing in the house. At the beginning of the Senate hearing the chair, seeing how many requests from communities for Legacy funds, warned the audience that some \$30 million of the legacy funds needed to be reserved to maintain and restore the cultural arts due to the Capitol Restoration. A week or so following the hearing, the Chair of the Committee indicated he would include language in the conference committee recommendations directing the Arts and Humanities Board to ensure grants are made to entities, organizations and individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds. This language passed the House and Senate. Monitoring these allocations will be necessary to ensure the grants reach the diversity targets.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

Senator Hawj and COMB's consultants Roderick Southall and Stephanie Manns organized a lobbying team that was very active with moving the legislation forward. The team met periodically in person and by phone, testified and developed various documents to support the position of the legislation. They visited every legislator on the house and senate committees that would make a decision regarding the legislation. They also coordinated a very active action alert call-in campaign to house and senate legacy legislative committee members. Our community leaders worked tirelessly meeting with legislators to garner support for this bill throughout the session.

❖ SUMMARY OF OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LEGISLATION



Where the legislation stood at mid-session

House File 945 and Senate File 1819 Economic Development: A bill for an act relating to workforce development; expanding the membership for the Urban Initiative Board; authorizing African heritage urban challenge grants; amending Minnesota Statutes 2014, sections 116M.15, subdivision 1; 116M.18, by adding as 1.5 a subdivision. **This bill was initially sponsored by Representatives Isaacson, Dehn, Bly and Moran and Senators Eaton and Rest.** The bill was referred to House Greater Minnesota Economic and Workforce Development Policy -

Committee Chair: **Bob Gunther (GOP)** and Senate Jobs, Agriculture and Rural Development Committee Chair: **Dan Sparks (DFL)**

The final language

The bill was introduced on the House Floor by Reps Isaacson and Dehn. Due to the change in house control, there was no support this year for the legislation. However, as the session progressed individual sections of the bill began to advance by organization that would benefit from those aspects of the bill if passed. For example, Little Africa which would have benefited from the economic development training fund and the YWCA which would have benefited from the commercial driver's license fund worked with legislators to advance those aspects of our bill separately. Those bills are still alive after the governor's veto of the jobs and agriculture omnibus bill. The bills did not get considered in the special session.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

COBM assigned staff and a consultant to this effort and they spent a considerable amount of time working with key legislators to try to move the bill forward. They found authors and met with the African Heritage legislators to discuss the bill but those legislators were moving a different economic development bill and could not provide support or leadership with COBM's bill. Staff and consultant assigned to this effort were reassigned to help generally with legislation that had a better chance of success. The legislation bill sponsors attended one of the caucus sessions to explain why the bill had little chance in the session but encouraged caucus participants to work for its passage next session.

❖ SUMMARY OF OUR INITIAL HOUSING LEGISLATION

The COBM Housing Legislation provides \$100 million to an initiative called Housing Opportunities Made Equitable to:

- Target mortgages to Communities of color for disparity reduction in homeownership
- Expand the participation of entities of color homeownership counseling
- Expand the participation of entities of color in the production of housing units in the MFHA 2015 Plan



Where the legislation stood at mid-session

HF 997 and SF 282 HOME Pilot Project: A bill for an act relating to housing; appropriating money for the housing opportunities made equitable (HOME) pilot project. The lead on this bill was with the HOME Pilot program partners. **This bill was initially sponsored by Representatives Clark, Moran, Dehn, R., Mariani, Fischer, Gunther, Ward, Hornstein and Mary Murphy and**

Senators Hawj, Marty, Goodwin, and Hayden. The bill was referred to House Job Growth & Energy Affordability Policy and Finance - Committee **Chair: Pat Garofalo (GOP)** and Senate Finance Committee - **Chair: Richard Cohen (DFL)**

The final language

This bill received hearings, and had the support of several key legislators, but unfortunately it didn't pass, no direct appropriation for this work was included in the final bill. However, in early discussions between COBM, Build Wealth, Inc. and the Commissioner of Minnesota Housing agreed set aside money in the overall housing budget to cover some of the funds needed to continue these important programs.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

The COBM staff supported MICAH and several partner organizations in their efforts to pass this legislation. We attended hearings, shared action alerts with our constituents, and met with legislators as part of the process of getting hearings and shoring up votes.



SUMMARY OF OUR INITIAL COBM EXPANSION LEGISLATION

The COBM Organization Expansion Legislation adds \$300,000 to our base appropriations each year to achieve, in part, the following:

- Operate satellite offices in Rochester, Duluth, Mankato, and Saint Cloud.
- Change the name to Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
- Governor Appointments to 13 with representation of African Americans, Caribbean, East Africans and West Africans.

Where the legislation stood at mid-session

HF 1418 and SF1650 COBM Expansion Legislation: A bill for an Act relating to state government; expanding duties and powers of the Council on Black Minnesotans and changing the Council's name to the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage and opening Council offices in Duluth, St. Cloud and Mankato. **This bill was authored by Representatives Murphy,**

Carlson, Clark, E. Murphy, and Dehn as well as Senators Carlson, Clausen, Senjem, Metzen and Wiger. The bill was referred to Government Operations and Election Policy - Committee Chair: Tim Sanders (GOP) and State and Local Government Committee - Chair: Patricia Torres Ray (DFL)

The final language

We were not given a hearing in the Senate or House. Restructuring the Council on Black Minnesotans and the Asian and Latino Affairs Councils got signed into law: House File 1353 A bill for an act to restructure and reform the ethnic councils. The bill was authored by Representatives Laine, Moran, Sarah Anderson, Mullery, Mariani, Runbeck, Howe, Cornish, Ward, Nash, Pugh and Fischer and Senators Pappas, Hayden, Hawj and Saxhaug

This bill does the following:

Sec. 5 [15.0145] ETHNIC COUNCILS

Subdivision 1 **Three ethnic councils; creation**

(b) The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage includes public members of black African ancestry.

Subd. 2. **Membership.** (a) Each council has 15 voting members. Eleven members of each council are public members appointed by the governor. Four members of each council are legislators.

(b) The governor shall appoint 11 members of each council as follows:

(2) The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage must include members who are broadly representative of the African heritage community of the state. The council must include at least five women. At least three members must be first or second generation African immigrants, who generally reflect the demographic composition of these African immigrants, as determined by the state demographer; and

The council must include at least five women. For purposes of this clause, ancestry refers to heritage that is commonly accepted in Minnesota as a unique population.

(c) Four legislators are voting members of each council. The speaker of the house and the house minority leader shall each appoint one member to each council. The Subcommittee on Committees of the senate Committee on Rules and Administration shall appoint one member of the majority caucus and one member of the minority caucus to each council.

(d) The governor may appoint a commissioner of a state agency or a designee of that commissioner to serve as an ex-officio, nonvoting member of a council.

Subd. 3. **Appointments; terms; removal.** (a) In making appointments to a council, the governor shall consider an appointee's proven dedication and commitment to the council's community and any expertise possessed by the appointee that might be beneficial to the council, such as experience in public policy, legal affairs, social work, business, or management. The executive director of a council and legislative members may offer advice to the governor on applicants seeking appointment.

(b) Terms, compensation, and filling of vacancies for members appointed by the governor are as provided in section 15.059. Removal of members appointed by the governor is governed by section 15.059, except that: (1) a member who missed more than half of the council meetings convened during a 12-month period automatically is removed from the council; and (2) a member appointed by the governor may be removed by a vote of three of the four legislative members of the council.

The chair of a council shall inform the governor of the need for the governor to fill a vacancy on the council. Legislative members serve at the pleasure of their appointing authority.

(c) A member appointed by the governor may serve no more than a total of eight years on a council. A legislator may serve no more than eight consecutive years or 12 nonconsecutive years on any one council.

Subd. 4. Training; executive committee; meetings; support. (a) A member appointed by the governor must attend orientation training within the first six months of service for each term. The commissioner of administration must arrange for the training to include but not be limited to the legislative process, government data practices, open meeting law, Robert's Rules of Order, fiscal management, and human resources. The governor must remove a member who does not complete the training.

(b) Each council shall annually elect from among the members appointed by the governor a chair and other officers it deems necessary. These officers and one legislative member selected by the council shall serve as the executive committee of the council.

(c) Forty percent of voting members of a council constitutes a quorum. A quorum is required to conduct council business. A council member may not vote on any action if the member has a conflict of interest under section 10A.07.

(d) Each council shall receive administrative support from the commissioner of administration under section 16B.371. The council may contract in its own name but may not accept or receive a loan or incur indebtedness except as otherwise provided by law. Contracts must be approved by a majority of the members of the council and executed by the chair and the executive director. The council may apply for, receive, and expend in its own name grants and gifts of money consistent with the powers and duties specified in this section.

(e) The attorney general shall provide legal services to the councils on behalf of the state on all matters relating to the councils, including matters relating to the state as the employer of the executive directors of the council, and other council staff.

Subd. 5. Executive director; staff. (a) The Legislative Coordinating Commission must appoint an executive director for each council. The executive director must be experienced in administrative activities and familiar with the challenges and needs of the ethnic council's larger community. The executive director serves in the unclassified service at the pleasure of the Legislative Coordinating Commission.

(b) The Legislative Coordinating Commission must establish a process for recruiting and selecting applicants for the executive director positions. This process must include consultation and collaboration with the applicable council.

(c) The executive director and applicable council members must work together in fulfilling council duties. The executive director must consult with the commissioners of administration and management and budget to ensure appropriate financial, purchasing, human resources, and other services for operation of the council.

The executive director must appoint and supervise the work of other staff necessary to carry out the duties of the council. The executive director and other council staff are executive branch employees.

Subd. 6. Duties of council. (a) A council must work for the implementation of economic, social, legal, and political equality for its constituency. The council shall work with the legislature and governor to carry out this work by performing the duties in this section.

(b) A council shall advise the governor and the legislature on issues confronting the constituency of the council. This may include, but is not limited to, presenting the results of surveys, studies, and community forums to the appropriate executive departments and legislative committees.

(c) A council shall advise the governor and the legislature of administrative and legislative changes needed to improve the economic and social condition of the constituency of the council. This may include but is not limited to working with legislators to develop legislation to address these issues and to work for passage of the legislation.

This may also include making recommendations regarding the state's affirmative action program and the state's targeted group small business program, or working with state agencies and organizations to develop business opportunities and promote economic development for the constituency of the council.

(d) A council shall advise the governor and the legislature of the implications and effect of proposed administrative and legislative changes on the constituency of the council. This may include but is not limited to tracking legislation, testifying as appropriate, and meeting with executive departments and legislators.

(e) A council shall serve as a liaison between state government and organizations that serve the constituency of the council. This may include but is not limited to working with these organizations to carry out the duties in paragraphs (a) to (d), and working with these organizations to develop informational programs or publications to involve and empower the constituency in seeking improvement in their economic and social conditions.

(f) A council shall perform or contract for the performance of studies designed to suggest solutions to the problems of the constituency of the council in the areas of education, employment, human rights, health, housing, social welfare, and other related areas.

(g) In carrying out duties under this subdivision, councils may act to advise on issues that affect the shared constituencies of more than one council.

Subd. 7. Duties of council members. A council member shall:

- (1) Attend and participate in scheduled meetings and be prepared by reviewing meeting notes;
- (2) Maintain and build communication with the community represented;
- (3) Collaborate with the council and executive director in carrying out the council's duties; and
- (4) Participate in activities the council or executive director deem appropriate and necessary to facilitate the goals and duties of the council.

Subd. 8. Reports. A council must report on the measurable outcomes achieved in the council's current strategic plan to meet its statutory duties, along with the specific objectives and outcome measures proposed for the following year.

The council must submit the report by January 15 each year to the chairs of the committees in the House of Representatives and the senate with primary jurisdiction over state government operations.

Each report must cover the calendar year of the year before the report is submitted. The specific objectives and outcome measures for the following current year must focus on three or four achievable objectives, action steps, and measurable outcomes for which the council will be held accountable.

The strategic plan may include other items that support the statutory purposes of the council but should not distract from the primary statutory proposals presented.

The funding request of each council, after approval by the Legislative Coordinating Commission, must also be presented by February 1 in each odd-numbered year.

Sec. 86.

TRANSITION.

(a) Members of an ethnic council specified in new Minnesota Statutes, section 15.0145, on July 1, 2015, continue to serve on the council until the end of their current term. However, if a member of a council has served eight years or more on the council at any time before December 31, 2015, the term of that member expires December 31, 2015. If a council has more members on July 1, 2015, than is provided for by Minnesota Statutes, section 15.0145, positions on the council shall not be filled until the expiration of a term results in fewer members on the council than provided for in Minnesota Statutes, section 15.0145. Membership qualifications newly specified in Minnesota Statutes, section 15.0145, must be complied with as soon as possible when terms of current members expire.

(b) The Legislative Coordinating Commission must appoint an executive director for each council no later than November 15, 2015. The authority of the Legislative Coordinating Commission to recruit and select persons to serve as executive directors is effective the day following final enactment. An incumbent executive director of a council may apply to be appointed by the Legislative Coordinating Commission but, if not selected, the employment of the incumbent ends when the Legislative Coordinating Commission appoints a new executive director, or on another date determined by the Legislative Coordinating Commission. Other council staff are transferred to employment with the reformulated councils specified in Minnesota Statutes, section 15.0145.

(c) Minnesota Statutes, section 15.039, subdivisions 1 to 6, apply to the ethnic councils that are reformulated in this act.

Caucus at the Capitol activities to support this effort

We continued to push the community driven legislation through our testimonies, one to one meetings with both House and Senate representatives and numerous handouts detailing the work we did with the community and detailing our recommendations. The council spent an enormous amount of time and effort attending hearings, meeting with legislators in both chambers, sending

out notices and alerts to the community, making phone calls and posting on FB and using email to alert our members on the status of this and other legislation. Our efforts to promote our community-driven bill fell on deaf ears. The bill that passed seems to have provision that violate the state constitution related to separation of powers between branches of government and seem to be retaliation for the publishing of the state's compliance with its human rights, affirmative action and procurement act. COBM board has proposed seeking judicial clarity on the separation of powers issues and protections under state and federal whistleblower protection laws.

COBM News Articles from the session

Council on Black Minnesotans faces retaliation for reporting on inequities

By: EDWARD MCDONALD | April 18, 2015



The State of Minnesota in 1980 created the Council on Black Minnesotans to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the political, social and economic resources, policies and procedures of the State of Minnesota. The council is a unique community-controlled entity that serves to negate underrepresentation in state government administrative operations and legislative deliberations until the underrepresentation is eradicated.

This structure provides for a community controlled collaborative relationship with state lawmakers and the executive branch, and generates administrative and legislative recommendations that have statewide impact for Minnesotans of African heritage. The Council should be allowed to continue doing its job.

In the first half of this year's legislative session, the Council on Black Minnesotans, as a requirement of its statutory duties, released "the answer" to the ferocious cry for equity and racial justice in the marketplace: *A 2015 Human Rights And Affirmative Action Analysis* that showed 16 years of major problems with the state's administrative application, its contracting program, and affirmative action policy, and 20 years of disinvestment in human rights enforcement.

The Council's "answer" establishes a direct correlation between the disinvestment in human rights enforcement and the poor administrative application of the aforementioned program and policy, with the underutilization of protected class people in state government operations, and by extension the growing disparities in the marketplace.

The council was proud of its "answer" to the marketplace cry for racial justice and equity and presented it to the executive and legislative branches but received two very different responses.

Governor Dayton and his staff responded by issuing an executive order that creates a task force comprised of state department commissioners that he will chair to strengthen contracting administration and affirmative action planning and administration. He recommended a budgetary

increase in human rights enforcement to the legislature, and he also hired an executive search person to recruit qualified protected class personnel for vacant cabinet level positions.

The legislative branch responded to the report by introducing bills to eliminate the council. They later modified the legislation, according to the bills authors to “clarify the purpose and duties of the ethnic councils.” However, each bill proposed removes the council’s requirement to “recommend changes” to the state’s affirmative action program.

To be clear, the specific language in their modified legislation states, “The council “may” make recommendations regarding the affirmative action program,” but also adds separately so long as it is “politically feasible.” This appears to be a small distinction, but the difference between “shall” and ‘may’ in statutory language leaves our recommendations to the whim of whomever happens to be in charge of their proposed “political feasibility” test.

If their legislation is supported it runs afoul of the state’s whistleblowing protection as there is a direct correlation now between our answer and the timing of the proposed legislation, which clearly removes the requirement to recommend changes to affirmative action.

The legislature needs to follow Governor Dayton’s lead to strengthen and reverse the disinvestment in human rights enforcement and support the Council on Black Minnesotans legislation to strengthen affirmative action and contracting monitoring by assigning the responsibility to the state auditor through our House File 1364 and Senate File 889.

In fact, we would like the legislature to support all our legislative recommendations that are shown in our mid-session progress report to address disparities. Our wish during the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act is to strengthen our state’s freedom from discrimination act.

To do this, our state must make a commitment to cultural agility in government operations and, by extension, in the marketplace. Cultural agility is reached with the employment of individuals and entities with cultural and linguistic competence to diversify an institution’s professional base so congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies can come together that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations, diverse culture communities, and reduces institutional isms.

Edward McDonald is executive director of the Council on Black Minnesotans. He welcomes reader responses to edward.mcdonald@state.mn.us.

Minnesota's ethnic councils pressured to change focus

By Frederick Melo

fmelo@pioneerpress.com

POSTED: 04/03/2015 12:01:00 AM CDT

When Sia Her became executive director of the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, she ruffled more than a few feathers.

She questioned why the council was using state funds and an estimated \$17,000 in staff time to coordinate the annual Dragon Festival at Lake Phalen without so much as a written partnership agreement or a mention in the event program.

Sia Her printed copies of the statutes that established the council in 1985 and asked each council member to review them. To her mind, the council had stopped adhering to the first tenet of its three-part mission statement: "To advise the Minnesota Legislature and the Governor on issues of importance to Asian Pacific Minnesotans."

A state Legislative Auditor's report last year described Minnesota's four ethnic councils, including the Council on Black Minnesotans, the Chicano Latino Affairs Council and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, as equally invisible at the Statehouse.

Proposed changes to their structure, though, have been hard to come by and appear stalled at the Capitol this year.

Not everyone says change is better, though.

Hector Garcia, executive director of the Chicano Latino Affairs Council, defends his council's work. Patwin Lawrence, board chairman of the Council on Black Minnesotans, said that for the first time since its creation in 1980, his council began proposing its own bills last year.

The four ethnic councils share about \$3 million in base funding from the state, though the majority of that -- about \$2 million -- goes to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. It gets more largely due to federal and state grants through the council for special programs it runs that the other councils do not.

Meanwhile, the Council on Black Minnesotans received \$392,000 in state funding last year, and the rest was split between the two other councils, with the Chicano Latino Affairs Council receiving \$275,000.

LITTLE TO SHOW

"When I first came on the Asian-Pacific Council, it was not doing much of value," said Rep. Carolyn Laine, DFL-Columbia Heights, who has sat on the board for three years. The lawmaker,

whose district includes many Tibetan immigrants, said council meetings had become more social than productive and were "worthless."

While praising Sia Her's efforts, Laine said the state's ethnic councils have been run like autonomous nonprofits and left to coordinate their own programs to fight racial disparities, without much to show for it.

Together with Sen. Sandy Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, she has proposed legislation that would force noticeable changes to three of the four ethnic councils. The bills do not touch the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council because of sovereignty issues.

The two lawmakers envision council staff testifying at the Legislature on day-to-day bills or training community members to do so.

"The idea is that they're advisory to us, to help us," Laine said. "They don't go out as a nonprofit and try to deal with these disparities. You need to be up here at the Legislature."

Council staff members, who are already state employees, would be placed under the auspices of the Legislative Coordinating Commission, much like the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and other state boards.

Each council would incorporate two House and two Senate lawmakers, representing the major parties with an even split. If three of the four lawmakers agreed, a council member could be removed from the board.

The legislation also would institute term limits of eight years.

"This isn't about capping us at the knee and stopping us from advocating," said Sia Her, who supports the bills even though they would force her to reapply for her own job. "There's a very important table where people advocate ... and we want to be at the table."

The bills have drawn wide reaction from lawmakers and council members. Pappas' and Laine's legislation is supported and co-sponsored by Sen. Founq Hawj, DFL-St. Paul; Rep. Rena Moran, DFL-St. Paul; and seven other lawmakers, including Sen. Jeff Hayden, DFL-Minneapolis.

Sen. Patricia Torres Ray, DFL-Minneapolis, has proposed competing legislation that would fold the three ethnic councils into a new state agency called the Department of Cultural and Ethnic Affairs, doing away with the councils as they currently exist.

"We have disparities in all areas -- health care, jobs, transportation," Torres Ray said. "I argue that the nature of advising is not strong enough, is not serious enough. These councils need to be part of state government, just like other departments. I'm bringing them under one umbrella."

STAY THE COURSE

There are supporters of the current system who argue the proposed changes would not work.

Mukthar Thakur, a state Department of Transportation employee who sits on the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, wrote Laine a letter saying her proposed legislation would do nothing to empower minority communities and would weaken them by giving the councils less control of their staff.

Lawrence, the Council on Black Minnesotans chairman, said in a recent interview that his board is more visible and effective than ever. To date, it has proposed 18 pieces of legislation, and all but one found a lawmaker as sponsor, he said. The council has opened a satellite office in Rochester and hopes to open others in Duluth, Mankato and St. Cloud.

After the Legislative Auditor's report last year, Garcia, of the Chicano Latino Affairs Council, forwarded the office a list of 18 activities his council had undertaken. They ranged from presentations to legislative committees about the Latino community to a joint forum with MnDOT, the Mexican consulate and Torres Ray focusing on deaths and injuries at construction sites.

Garcia said his board should continue as an advisory group, and as a state employee, he said, he supports the idea of reporting more directly to a state body rather than a board in which only appointed community members can vote.

"The Pappas bill ... the problem that I have with that bill is that we would be reporting to the Legislative Coordinating Commission, which I don't think is necessarily the right part of government that we should be reporting to," Garcia said.

He suggests a trilateral council that is composed of community representatives as now, makes legislators voting members and adds representatives from the governor's office and Cabinet agencies.

The Torres Ray bill remains in committee. The Pappas legislation was recently tabled by the Senate State and Local Government Affairs committee, which is chaired by Torres Ray.

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Our view: Ethnic councils too important to scrap

By [News Tribune](#) on May 12, 2015

The 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War and the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation are being commemorated this year. It's also the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, a year after the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act.

This should be a time for celebration and a time to honor progress made.

But a party isn't on the minds of the Council on Black Minnesotans, one of four ethnic councils created by the state of Minnesota between 1963 and 1985 to advise state policymakers and to act as liaisons between St. Paul and the state's communities of color, specifically Minnesotans of Asian, African, Latino, Chicano and American Indian descent, helping to assure each group's fair and equitable representation.

In November, the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor released a report saying the councils were failing, that they weren't effective as liaisons or advisers. The report said they were isolated from state policymaking, lacked clear statutory purpose, didn't work together often enough or effectively enough, suffered from poor participation and were plagued by poor communication, among other issues.

The findings were especially stinging to the Council on Black Minnesotans because it already had been working on making changes and improvements after conducting an audit of its own in 2012.

"We've made substantive changes over the past couple of years, as well as organizational structural changes; that has made us even more effective," the council's board chairman, Patwin Lawrence of Minneapolis, told the News Tribune Opinion page this week. "We actually started making these changes even before the report. We actually provided (officials from the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor) with (our analysis and findings) before they did their report."

So no wonder some of the same shortcomings — or opportunities for improvement — were identified.

But the damage was done. The councils' reputations were sullied by the legislative audit report. And this legislative session, the criticism grew louder.

A bill was introduced to eliminate the Council on Black Minnesotans. Fortunately, it was defeated.

But another bill remains alive to restructure and to remake the council to address the issues raised in the legislative audit report. Those issues demand addressing, but the legislation proposed caused enough concern and raised enough questions to merit a rewrite, even if it means putting off changes until next session. A delay actually could be good. It could allow time for council officials, legislative leaders and others to work together on solutions that best benefit Minnesota, its communities of color, taxpayers and all residents.

One especially concerning proposed change would remove funding for the council from the state's general fund.

"Historically, if you're not in the general fund, your chances of being funded the next cycle: It's pretty hard," said Council on Black Minnesotans Executive Director Edward McDonald. "It'd

almost take an act of God to get back into the general-fund appropriation. That was a signal (to us) that efforts to eliminate the council may not be over.

To its credit, the Council on Black Minnesotans didn't cower from criticism. In the face of a serious threat to its own existence, the council went on the offensive. It called on the state to finance an independent audit, contending that the state has failed to meet its own laws with regard to affirmative action, civil rights, human rights and more.

"The state for the past 16 years has not been in compliance," McDonald said.

In addition, the state has the ability to fix disparities but hasn't, McDonald charged. And the state Department of Human Rights hasn't had a net increase in funding for nearly 20 years.

"You are slowly depleting its staffing and its ability to operate," McDonald said.

Further, this legislative session, the council sought funding to open offices around the state, including in Duluth.

"In order for us to have maximum effectiveness, we do need people on the ground who are there permanently (and are) engaged in their communities," McDonald said.

The funding requests were long shots, at best. But like the proposal to eliminate the Council on Black Minnesotans and even like the damning legislative audit report, they were a clear sign that there's a need to rethink and to refocus Minnesota's ethnic councils. Their roles as adviser and liaison are as needed now as they were when the councils started being created more than five decades ago.

The council's own audit revealed opportunities for improvement. The legislative audit report did likewise, even if in a negative way. They deserve to be pursued.

As the News Tribune first said in November, the Minnesota Legislature, decades ago, saw a need for the councils. Minority populations lacked a voice. The Minnesota Legislature now sees a need for that voice to be more effective — not to be eliminated. All Minnesotans can come together to make sure that happens.

Our View: Are Minnesota's civil rights laws enforced?

Posted: Friday, April 24, 2015 7:24 pm

The Council on Black Minnesotans not only has an aggressive agenda for this year's Minnesota Legislature, but just as importantly, the agency wants existing laws enforced.

That's why the agency is calling for an external audit to gauge compliance on three statutes regarding [procurement](#), [affirmative action](#) and [human rights](#).

"This audit wouldn't be an 'I got you thing,' " said Edward McDonald, executive director of the [Council on Black Minnesotans](#), during a visit with the Post-Bulletin's Editorial Board. "We're just saying, take a look at this and quantify what's happening from an administrative application. We can do all the disparity reports and all the analysis we want, but that does not get at what is happening with the administrative application of laws that, in theory, say you should have absolute parity, if you apply these laws."

The proposal has merit when you consider that while Minnesota's overall unemployment rate is 3.7 percent, the [jobless rate for African-Americans is 12.4 percent](#), a gulf that's difficult to explain away. As evidence of that procurement, affirmative action and human rights laws aren't being enforced, McDonald also pointed to a [2009 study by MGT of America](#) that found longitudinal disparities in Minnesota state contracts awarded to minorities.

"We really believe that the center of the disparity is the administrative application of those three major laws," McDonald said.

The public sector, which is Minnesota's largest employer at nearly 40,000 workers, should be a role model for the private sector. "If they get it right, then by extension, the marketplace gets it right," he said. "So, they have to be the example."

Destination Medical Center, the \$6 billion expansion of Mayo Clinic with \$585 million of public money tied to infrastructure, can be one of those employment role models. "When public money — any amount — intersects with private money," McDonald reminded. "Equal-opportunity laws apply."

The impending growth fueled by DMC is one reason McDonald advocates establishing a regional office of the Department of Human Rights in Rochester. It would be better for statute compliance to be monitored by a Rochester office, rather than long distance from St. Paul. The Council of Black Minnesotans also recommends establishing regional offices in St. Cloud and Duluth in addition to the existing ones in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

McDonald described a ripple effect of what happens when minorities don't have equal opportunity. If a parent has a job, the family's economic status improves, and the family is more likely to own its home. Without owning a home, it's conceivable that a family could move a half-dozen times while a child is in elementary, middle and high school and have to deal with just as many different curriculums. That lack of stability contributes to the cycle of poverty.

Minnesota has been a pioneer in the civil rights movement for decades, McDonald said, pointing to historical figures such as longtime NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins, civil rights activist Nellie Stone Johnson, Sen. Hubert Humphrey, Gov. Harold Levander and Gov. Wendell Anderson, leading him to joke that "equal access and opportunity are as Minnesotan as the loon."

"It's the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act," McDonald said. "Wouldn't it be time, with these iconic figures, 50 years later at the forefront of this, to say it's time for us to take a step back and do an independent review of the administrative application of these laws and use that as a guide for where we go from here?"

McDonald is right. It's not enough to have civil rights laws on the books. Let's make sure they're enforced so there is equal opportunity for all Minnesotans.

What is the future of the Council on Black Minnesotans?

By: ISAAC PETERSON | April 15, 2015

It is a poorly kept secret that racial disparities exist in Minnesota. In literally every measurable aspect, education, income, housing, employment, etc., people of color lag behind their white counterparts. This in spite of the efforts of many to make and keep Minnesota an all-inclusive place to live, that provides equal opportunities.

One of those efforts was the creation of the state ethnic councils. Created by the legislature in 1980, “The Minnesota state councils were created by the legislature to represent and advocate for Minnesota’s communities of color, women, and disability communities. The councils include: Chicano Latino Affairs Council, Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, Council on Black Minnesotans, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and Minnesota State Council on Disability and the Office on the Economic Status of Women,” according to the councils’ website.

But obviously, even though the councils have existed for 35 years, racial disparities and conflicts remain.

The newest race-based conflict is over competing bills in the legislature.

The bill at the center of the dispute is HF 1353, whose description reads “Minnesota ethnic councils governing laws revised” and whose lead author is Minnesota State Representative Carolyn Laine, DFL.

“The Office of Legislative Auditor in his report last year said that they [the councils] weren’t clear on what their duties were—their duties need to be fine-tuned and clarified,” Laine explained as her reason for drafting the proposed bill.

“There was some fine tuning around the edges,” Laine said. “It makes them, I hope, better, so that we can actually have them, because I really like them; it’s just that they need to work better. The main duties that they all have, have been to be what I would call to be the ‘eyes and ears of the Legislature’ into the communities and giving the communities access into government. That’s the statutory purpose of the state agencies—they are state agencies, and their job is to help the Legislature and the Governor.”

Laine continued, saying that her bill focuses on the councils’ duties, among which she listed “...To serve the Legislature and Executive branch as a liaison back and forth; that doesn’t

change [in her bill]. The only thing that I did to those four main duties is to give examples. ‘May include but not limited to’ is the way I phrase it, because they don’t have to do any of these examples; these are examples of what they could do to have measurable outcomes in these areas.

“For example, if they were supposed to do trade relations with other countries and can’t do it, then they’re a failure. I don’t want them to be failures, I want them to do the things that they can do and be successful. But that’s asking a small council to do a huge task that they cannot do.”

But there has been opposition to the proposed legislation, with the most vocal opposition coming from the Council on Black Minnesotans (COBM).

COBM Executive Director Edward McDonald told the Daily Planet that “The big issue with the bill is that it strips the Council on Black Minnesotans from monitoring and analyzing the state compliance with equal opportunity, affirmative action and civil rights requirements.

“The council doesn’t agree with the bill, PERIOD. We don’t like any line in Laine’s bill. Every line in it is wrong. Not one line in her bill is appropriate for the Council on Black Minnesotans. What IS appropriate,” McDonald said, is a bill drafted by the COBM.

McDonald says their bill took two years to draft and would fine tune the legislation that created the councils to, in his words, “...make us all-inclusive of our broad and diverse community; it gives us reach throughout the state to basically interact and work with those communities better; and it [increases] the accountability to the Legislative branch, Executive branch, and the community as a whole.”

Laine insisted that in her bill “Their duties have not changed; their purpose has NOT changed at all. So I zeroed in on the main duties, exactly as they’ve always been, and then just clarified some examples. And I cut off some of the ones that were extra.

Addressing the opposition to her bill, Laine said, “One of the objections that’s been floated out there is that affirmative action is taken away, but it’s not. All the councils were supposed to be watching over and giving feedback on the proper use of affirmative action in state government. That doesn’t change at all.”

But McDonald maintained that “Rep. Laine has not worked with our community to craft what she has. We’ve worked with legislators and our community and introduced a bill, and quite frankly, she and others have fought to not have our bill heard in the Senate or in the House. We believe our community voice should be included in what they’re crafting.” The bills that COBM drafted and supports has as some of its provisions:

- ❑ Operate satellite offices in Rochester, Duluth, Mankato, and Saint Cloud.
- ❑ Change the name to Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
- ❑ Governor Appointments to 13 with representation of African Americans, Caribbean, East Africans and West Africans.
- ❑ Partner with the appropriate state departments on African Heritage business recruitment to the state of MN and international trade relations with African nations.
- ❑ Brief the Governor and legislative leaders face to face on policy and administrative matters of concern to Minnesotans of African Heritage and COBM.
- ❑ Testify before legislative committees on all legislation that may affect the Black Community.
- ❑ Recommend bonding initiatives that benefit the African Heritage Community.
- ❑ The Council will be a first source of contact for members of the legislature and office of the Governor on matters concerning the African heritage community during the legislative session.
- ❑ The Council will be available to political caucuses during the legislative session to confer on matter related to the Black community.
- ❑ The Council will develop an annual strategic plan to achieve outcomes related to implementing its statutory mandates.
- ❑ The Council will use an outside source to conduct an annual strategic plan outcome review to guide the development of its annual strategic plan.

McDonald said, “The council believes that the intent of Laine’s bill is to eliminate our ability to monitor, report, and advocate for equal opportunity compliance with the state. That’s so huge.”

- ❑ When we asked the Governor’s office whether Governor Dayton would be inclined to sign legislation that would end the Council on Black Minnesotans’ monitoring affirmative action and equal opportunity, Dayton spokesman Matt Swenson replied “Governor Dayton does not support the elimination of the Council on Black Minnesotans or the other Councils. He encourages stakeholders to work with the Legislature to strengthen the Councils’ effectiveness and accountability, and enable them to better-serve their respective communities.”

Thanks to [Isaac Peterson](#) and [TC Daily Planet](#) for sharing this story with us.

Minnesota: Tight focus can make state's minority councils matter: Pioneer Press editorial

Pioneer Press

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There is good reason to make sure the state's ethnic councils function effectively in Minnesota: jobs, jobs, jobs.

To maintain its longstanding competitive advantage -- a productive workforce -- Minnesota needs all its workers, now and even more for future economic success.

Lawmakers are considering options for restructuring the councils -- created several decades ago to advise lawmakers on the needs of the state's ethnic communities -- after a critical report issued last year by the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

It found little evidence that the groups -- the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, Council on Black Minnesotans, Chicano Latino Affairs Council and Minnesota Indian Affairs Council -- were effective advisers or liaisons to state policymakers.

One approach to restructure the councils, which function as independent agencies in the executive branch, would not touch the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council because of sovereignty issues, the Pioneer Press has reported.

In response, the councils are making their case, with Hector Garcia, executive director of the Chicano Latino council, arguing for the importance of making any changes in consultation with the communities the councils would represent.

He highlights some key points about the state's workforce: "Tens of thousands of college-educated baby boomers will retire every year in the next decade. In order for Minnesota to stay competitive, we will only be able to fill those jobs if we get a much larger percentage of Latinos and young people from immigrant households graduating from college.

In a 2013 report, Bruce Corrie, a professor at Concordia University-St. Paul, and Sarah Radosevich of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce say that immigrants reverse an outflow from the state of highly educated and creative talent.

They note that, according to the state demographer, "immigrants have given Minnesota a net influx of educated and creative talent in recent years. Of native U.S. residents, more college-educated individuals leave Minnesota each year than relocate to the state. The same is true for entrepreneurs, individuals in creative industries, and individuals with degrees in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields."

The councils, Rep. Carolyn Laine told us, were intended to serve as "the eyes and ears of the Legislature into the communities," and also to "provide the communities with access back into government," showing them how to interact with lawmakers.

But until just recently, the Democrat from Columbia Heights told us, many legislators "didn't have any awareness that they existed. If they did, they didn't find them effective at all. It wasn't working."

Her bill would place the councils under the jurisdiction of the Legislative Coordinating Commission, like some other state boards, including the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

The Pioneer Press has reported that the four ethnic councils share about \$3 million in base funding from the state, though the majority of that -- about \$2 million -- goes to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. The Council on Black Minnesotans received \$392,000 in state funding last year, and the rest was split between the two other councils, with the Chicano Latino Affairs Council receiving \$275,000.

Representatives of the councils meeting with the Pioneer Press editorial board urged attention to under-representation of some ethnic groups in state government, among the ranks of employees and elected officials alike, and highlighted their ability to connect Minnesota with cultures and nations for trade and other opportunities.

The Council on Black Minnesotans also noted its "community-driven" legislative proposals, including measures on human rights, housing and workforce development.

"Some have advocated eliminating the councils because they've been in-effective," said Sen. Sandra Pappas, a St. Paul Democrat and chief author of companion legislation to Laine's bill. But then, lawmakers would "just come right back and re-create them because we need them," Pappas told us.

A re-clarified, well-focused purpose for the councils is necessary. Legislators should ground them in recognizing the economic opportunity in our changing demographics, and in maintaining the advantage of a productive, well qualified workforce.

Jobs, jobs, jobs, in other words.