

Dear Mayor Dave,

I am writing this letter after considerable contemplation and soul-searching, acknowledging that the outcomes which could occur may or may not be what I would hope for.

You may recall a couple of years ago when you and I met in your office along with two of my fellow commissioners from the Community Services Commission (then Commission, now Committee), Celia Jackson and Lina Trivedi. Regrettably, both Celia and Lina are no longer on the CSC; the other tidbit of news since then is that I have "ascended" to the Chair position. Unfortunately some of the dynamics we discussed with you then (dissension, etc.) are still present, however the reason I write today is to bring to your attention a situation which I find very troubling, i.e., the lack of diversity on the Community Services Committee.

Ten of the eleven Community Services Committee members are White Caucasians.

We are just winding down on our biennial application/contract process. We are charged with evaluating and rating the applications of well over 100 programs administered by non-profit agencies, each and every one of which is very worthy of city funding. As you can imagine, the requests vastly outpace the available funding levels and the decision-making can be quite emotional and difficult. But this letter is not about dollars (that one may come later). It's about what's fair and about what's right.

Ironically, one of the seven criteria areas upon which we rate contract applications relates to how an agency and its program propose services that are ". . . appropriate to the needs of low income individuals, culturally diverse populations and/or populations with specific language barriers and/or physical or mental disabilities." One measure of this criterion is the diversity of the agency's staff and its Board of Directors, a factor which I find to be fair. However, my problem comes about when I look around the table at our 91% white faces (we have one Latina woman who serves as the "minority representative"). To my knowledge, none of us could be considered as low or low-to-middle income, yet we are in a position in which we try to "walk the walk."

It greatly troubles me that we sit in judgment of contract awards between \$3 and \$4 million when it is difficult, if not impossible, to relate on any sort of a personal level to those whose lives we seek to improve. (I readily acknowledge that the ultimate funding decisions are made by the Common Council and are approved by you). Recently, I gave some serious consideration to resigning my seat on the CSC with a plea to you to replace me with a person of color or a representative of one of the disadvantaged groups we fund. I was encouraged to retain my seat, because I am told that I am one of those who "gets it," so I will stay at least for the near future and instead I am writing you this letter.

This letter is not intended to diminish the personal knowledge and professional experience each of us brings to the table. The eleven of us each represent a unique perspective which invariably blend well to make compassionate and well-grounded decisions. We have some members who have served for

many years, along with some "rookies," each and every one of whom contribute greatly to the support of Madison's most vulnerable population groups.

If you would agree, I would like to meet with you, Bill Clingan, and CDBG Chair Charlie Sanders to begin to explore some solutions for the lack of diversity on the CSC (perhaps Lucia Nunez could also participate). I am not as familiar with the CDBG, but I believe their situation may be somewhat comparable. Both Bill and Charlie are very aware of my concerns.

To be clear, this letter represents my personal perspectives and opinions only, not necessarily those of my fellow committee members.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the CSC and, more important, those agencies which serve those most in need.

Sincerely,

Alan Sweet, Chair
Community Services Committee

copy: Bill Clingan
Charlie Sanders