

Ramsey County Attorney's Office Diversity: A Mission-Critical Value

The mission of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office is to promote justice and public safety, protect the vulnerable and provide leadership and quality legal services. Having a diverse, inclusive workforce – one that reflects the community we serve, honors the unique perspectives of the individuals with whom we work and come in contact, and supports the contributions of all – is critical to the success of that mission.

Diversity is more than race or ethnicity. It means recognizing, respecting and valuing the unique perspectives and contributions of individuals, as well as the many variables that can influence those perspectives and contributions. These variables include not only race and ethnicity, but also gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, educational background, national origin, marital or parental status, income level, military experience, and many other factors as well.

Diversity must be a priority for our office. Through our efforts, we intend to:

1. **Attract and retain a diverse workforce** – one which reflects the community we serve;
2. **Build an inclusive office culture** – one which welcomes, supports, and draws upon diverse perspectives from a fully engaged, creative, and empowered staff; and
3. **Develop intercultural expertise**, understanding and responding to the diverse needs of the community we serve.

Our community is very diverse and growing more so every day. We need the trust of that community in order to do our jobs. An important value in *any* organization, diversity is of special importance to the work of our office. **In order to protect public safety and pursue justice, we need the cooperation of the community we serve** in: reporting crimes and incidents of abuse and/or neglect; providing testimony about these incidents; bringing mentally ill and chemically dependent family members into the system for help; serving as jurors and pursuing and complying with orders for child support, to name just a few examples.

At the same time, **we operate within a justice system that has long had a disproportionate impact on certain segments of society.** To choose just one example, studies indicate that African-American men face a nearly one-in-three chance to serving time in prison at some point in their lives; the rate for Caucasian men is one in sixteen. These disparities, then, are of deep concern not only on their own but also because of their pernicious effects. A 1995 poll found that more than half of African-Americans believed that the justice system was biased against them.¹ “[E]ven the perception of unfairness impacts the public’s trust and confidence in the courts and the justice system.”²

¹ Robert M.A. Johnson, *Chair's Counsel: Racial Bias in the Criminal Justice System and Why We Should Care*, Criminal Justice, Winter 2007 Volume 21, Number 4.

² *White Paper on State Court's Responsibility to Address Issues of Racial and Ethnic Fairness*, Conference of State Court Administrators; Government Relations Office (December 2001).

A diverse, culturally aware workforce is essential for earning the community's trust. It engenders the cooperation we need in order to do our jobs. A culturally aware workforce, which reflects the community it serves, assures the members of that community that the office is in fact serving them; a non-diverse workforce sends a message – subtle or overt – that the odds may be stacked against them. Earning the community's trust and confidence has yet another benefit that is reflected in recent research indicating that offenders are far more likely to respond to a system that they view as legitimate than one they view as arbitrary or even biased. A diverse, culturally-competent workforce bolsters this legitimacy, contributing to the effectiveness of our work.

A workforce reflecting the values of diversity helps us to serve the community better in other ways as well:

- **Better ideas and decisions:** Our work is challenging, frequently requiring judgment calls. The stakes – vulnerable victims and clients' fundamental rights – are high. A diverse workforce gives our office the benefit of a wide variety of perspectives on these challenges. In an inclusive office culture, these perspectives are shared by a fully engaged, creative, and empowered staff, leading to better outcomes.
- **Better service to clients and other external stakeholders:** A workforce, which reflects the community it serves, can better understand the concerns, motivations, and needs of the individuals in that community.
- **A higher-quality workforce:** People want to work where they feel comfortable and where their contributions are valued. With an inclusive office culture, we strive to be an "employer of choice," helping us to attract and retain the best employees of all backgrounds.
- **A more unified office:** Our office encompasses a variety of functions operating from a variety of geographically-spread locations. There is often little apparent reason – nor even opportunity – for employees in different functions to interact. An inclusive office culture which connect us with one another (1) encourages us to be resources for one another, for information and tools; (2) reduces the sense of isolation which can come from working in a relatively narrow area; and (3) gives us a shared sense of mission and an even greater motivation to serve.

Put simply, we operate one of the premier public law offices in the state. We serve one of the most diverse communities in the state. We have a special responsibility to render that service with sensitivity to the diverse perspectives and contributions of our workforce and community.