

Dissenting Opinion on NH House Bill 392

I strongly dissent from the passage of **NH House Bill 392**, which directs the dissolution of the **Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Health Equity, the Department of Environmental Services' functions for civil rights and environmental justice, and the Governor's Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion**. This legislation represents a significant step backward in New Hampshire's commitment to fairness, public health, environmental responsibility, and inclusive governance.

The Dismantling of the Office of Health Equity is a Public Health Threat

The **Office of Health Equity** plays a critical role in addressing health disparities across New Hampshire. Its dissolution would:

- **Reduce access to essential health services** for marginalized communities, including rural residents, lower-income families, and individuals facing systemic barriers to care.
- **Jeopardize federal funding**—The Office of Health Equity administers approximately **\$4.6 million annually in federal grants** and another **\$700,000 in other federal funds** to improve public health outcomes. The bill makes it unclear whether these funds will be forfeited or reallocated, potentially creating gaps in service.
- **Undermine economic efficiency**—The estimated **\$100,000 in general fund savings** from eliminating the director's salary is negligible compared to the essential services and funding that would be lost.

By dismantling this office, the state risks worsening health inequities and placing additional strain on an already burdened healthcare system.

Eliminating Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Oversight Poses Legal and Economic Risks

The bill directs the **Department of Environmental Services** to cease funding projects labeled as "civil rights and environmental justice," a vague and overly broad directive that could have severe unintended consequences:

- **Loss of Federal Funding**—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) mandates compliance with **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** and other federal statutes for recipients of federal funds. The Department of Environmental Services receives **\$80-\$90 million annually in federal funding** tied to such compliance. Restricting environmental justice initiatives may put these funds at risk, creating a financial burden on state taxpayers.
- **Increased Environmental Disparities**—Environmental justice initiatives ensure that **low-income and historically disadvantaged communities** do not suffer disproportionately from pollution, hazardous waste, and industrial development. Ending these functions could leave vulnerable populations without adequate environmental protections.
- **Legal and Reputational Risks**—New Hampshire could face federal enforcement actions or lawsuits for failing to uphold civil rights protections, leading to costly litigation and reputational damage.

Dissolving the Governor's Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion Signals a Retreat from Progress

The Governor's Advisory Council on **Diversity and Inclusion** serves as a vital forum for ensuring that state policies reflect the values of fairness, opportunity, and equitable governance. Its dissolution would:

- **Silence marginalized voices**—The council provides a platform for communities that have historically been excluded from decision-making.
- **Weaken workforce and economic competitiveness**—A diverse and inclusive environment attracts businesses, skilled workers, and fosters innovation. Eliminating this council sends a discouraging message to companies considering investment in the state.
- **Reduce public trust in government**—Disbanding a body dedicated to **ensuring fair treatment and inclusive governance** undermines confidence in the state's commitment to serving all residents.

Conclusion: NH House Bill 392 is a Step in the Wrong Direction

Rather than eliminating essential offices and initiatives that promote health, environmental responsibility, and inclusivity, the legislature should be working to **strengthen** these efforts. This bill prioritizes short-term cost-cutting over long-term well-being, economic stability, and legal compliance. The potential loss of federal funding, coupled with the societal and economic consequences, makes this legislation deeply flawed and harmful to the interests of New Hampshire residents.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose **HB 392** and urge my colleagues to reject this bill in favor of policies that uphold the principles of **equity, environmental stewardship, and inclusive governance** for all.