

# Dept. of Safety and Professional Services: Secretary-designee Dawn Crim joins Cap Times Ideas Fest and Wisconsin Leadership Summit, launches agency diversity initiative

Posted on Saturday, Oct 3, 2020

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**MADISON, Wis. – Department of Safety and Professional Services Secretary-designee Dawn Crim** will lend her equity, diversity, and inclusion insight to two events next week. On Monday, October 5, she is a panelist in the [Wisconsin Leadership Summit](#) session “Words to Live By: Moving Beyond the D&I Statements” from 9:45–11 a.m. The week-long event, presented by Madison 365, brings together some of the area’s most prominent leaders to explore issues facing government, education, healthcare, and more.

On Wednesday, Oct. 6, Secretary-designee Crim is moderating the [Cap Times Idea Fest](#) panel, “Can Madison attract more professionals of color, and if so, how?” The session brings together panelists Aaron Bird Bear, UW–Madison Director of Tribal Relations, teacher and journalist Esther Cepeda, and former UW–Madison Chief Diversity Officer Patrick Sims. The session will focus on how to attract more people of color to the predominantly white Madison community.

“I am honored to be a part of these discussions and, more importantly, the solutions to some of the problems facing our community and state,” Crim said. “I have been in Madison for 25 years, and we’ve been working hard to make this a more welcoming place for people of color. We have made great progress, but there is more we can do. I look forward to both panels, and I have no doubt they will generate good ideas and good energy to put toward the effort.”

Secretary-designee Crim is a founding member of the [Madison Network of Black Professionals](#) and has focused on developing leadership skills in and creating opportunity for leaders of color throughout her career, and she has put her experience into practice at DSPS. The Wisconsin Leadership Summit and the Cap Times Idea Fest are the two most recent events related to her broader initiative to promote diversity and inclusion efforts in the industries the agency regulates.

Earlier this fall she met with representatives from [eMpowHer](#), an organization for women in building trades, to address the lack of gender diversity in the construction industry. Women account for only about 10 percent of that workforce, according to the [National Association of Women in Construction \(NAWIC\)](#), despite strong salaries across the industry. Representatives from several professions joined her for an hour-long discussion of current pipelines to trades careers, programs designed to broaden exposure to construction fields, and challenges for women within the industry.

“Diversity and inclusion work cannot happen in a vacuum,” Crim said. “We need to know what is happening in the field, and we need to know what work is already being done. We want to find appropriate ways to support efforts and programs that already exist and help establish connections so that all groups working on these issues can better leverage resources. There may be things we can do directly, but there is already good work happening in certain pockets. We may be able to help elevate that work or expand it statewide.”

**Kilah Engelke** is a cement mason who works as a business agent for the [Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons Local 599](#) who participated in the diversity discussion. While she is quick to cite many advantages to careers in the construction trades – apprenticeship programs that don’t require educational debt, high wages and stable demand, low likelihood for outsourcing — Engelke also believes that diverse teams improve work and generate better results.

“As the needs of society change, so does how we tackle the building of infrastructure, towns, roads, cities, and our communities. Different perspectives lead to different solutions,” Engelke said. “We need to be sure to not exclude anyone. Diversity is a practice and a culture that will become the new normal in all facets of business. Construction can’t afford to separate itself from this standard or we will lose out on valuable, talented people.”

Crim agrees that diverse workforces benefit everyone — individuals, organizations,

and the public in general.

“The more perspectives you have, the fewer blind spots you have,” Crim said. “You make better decisions when you consider as many factors as possible, and diversity helps bring more of those factors to the table.”

That commitment to making representative decision-making is a big part of why Crim always encourages other leaders to not only welcome diverse perspectives, but also to seek them out. When she joined DSPS in January 2019, she immediately saw an opportunity for that work within the agency.

The Department of Safety and Professional Services administers dozens of regulatory boards, councils, and committees. These groups are key decisionmakers and take action to keep professions current with evolving science and trends, to discipline professionals when appropriate, and to otherwise ensure safe practice for public protection.

Soon after her appointment, Crim began meeting with the leadership groups to learn about operations and vacancies. She quickly realized that some had open seats and others would during her tenure. So Secretary-designee Crim began incorporating board and committee service conversations into her regular stakeholder meetings and outreach events, and she emphasized the need for participation from individuals who could bring diverse perspectives or voices to their professions.

Then, COVID-19 emerged and brought with it a new urgency. As the pandemic wreaked havoc on the economy, it drove many people out of work and permanently shuttered many small businesses. People of color — workers and business owners — suffered the effects more often and to a greater degree than the general population.

Secretary-designee Crim knew that as a regulator of hundreds of professions and industries, DSPS would have a role in any economy recovery efforts. And if people of color were suffering to a much greater extent, then she believed that effective recovery efforts would have to address those needs directly. She again looks to the power of boards, committees, and councils — many of which establish standards for entry and practice for their fields — to help level the playing field.

“The boards, committees, and councils are standard-setters for their professions.

Evaluating standards and including diverse perspectives in those discussions may help professions become more inclusive,” Crim said, noting that diverse membership can help identify and eliminate structural barriers written into administrative rules or statutes. “As we work to support Wisconsin residents who may have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, we want to do what we can to support efforts to enter credentialed fields and, at the same time, ensure that these new career opportunities exist for everyone.”

Secretary-designee Crim will continue her D&I initiative into 2021 with more appearances and stakeholder events designed to raise awareness, leverage existing resources, and connect groups and individuals who could benefit from collaboration.

“It is time to look at the work we do, the professions we regulate, and the industries we serve to see what is possible,” said Crim. “There is a role for all of us, a need for all of us, and there is plenty of opportunity available.”

**Gov. Tony Evers** says the DSPS diversity initiative is a natural extension of [Executive Order 59](#), which requires each agency to establish and implement a comprehensive equity, diversity, and inclusion action plan.

“I am proud to see Dawn raising these questions and having these critically important conversations,” Gov. Evers said. “She is a natural facilitator who is skilled at bringing people together, bridging differences, and making room for new voices and ideas. Her optimistic approach helps others see change as opportunity and enables folks to envision a future of greater possibility for all. The people of Wisconsin are fortunate Dawn is where she is doing the work she is doing.”

The Department of Safety and Professional Services issues more than 240 unique licenses, administers dozens of boards and councils that regulate professions, enforces state building codes, runs the state fire prevention program, and maintains the award-winning Wisconsin Enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, which is a key tool in the multi-faceted public health campaign to stem excessive opioid prescribing. A fee-based agency, the Department of Safety and Professional Services is self-sustaining and receives no general fund tax dollars for its day-to-day operations. With five offices and 250 employees throughout Wisconsin, DSPS collaborates with constituents and stakeholders across a wide range of industries to promote safety and advance the economy.