

Dept. of Military Affairs: Values diversity within its ranks

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In January, Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, hosted the first meeting of the State Joint Diversity Executive Council (SJDEC), a retooled team authorized to drive meaningful change throughout the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs.

The council is modeled after the National Guard Bureau's Joint Diversity Executive Council, which has been recognized nationally as among the best in the nation. National Guard policy states that diversity and inclusion is to be institutionalized "by developing an agile, ready, innovative and adaptive force to attract, recruit, and retain a quality, inclusive and equitable work force that reflects the communities it serves."

The executive council "concentrates positional authority at appropriate levels, to include state leadership, for perspective and a unified voice which will drive the diversity, equity and inclusion message" throughout the organization, said Kathrine Bermudez, who provides training, education and resources to the SJDEC.

"The executive council proactively embeds a systematic application of the diversity, equity and inclusion lens across policies, processes and business decisions," Bermudez explained. "The executive council structure is the key — by virtue of the positional authority held by its members, they can institute meaningful changes to drive the Department of Military Affairs culture toward embracing inclusive behaviors that bring the Soldier, Airman and state employee experience front and center."

Knapp presides over the SJDEC, which includes the deputy adjutants general for Army and Air, the director of the Department of Military Affairs state human

resources, the director of staff, the Wisconsin Army National Guard chief of staff, the adjutant general's executive assistant, the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff's chief of staff, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's command chief warrant officer, the Wisconsin Air National Guard state command chief, and the Wisconsin Army National Guard state command sergeant major.

"The National Guard is actually ahead of the curve when it comes to diversity," Knapp observed. "The Soldiers and Airmen in our organization have different jobs and experiences when not on military status, and we recognize that as a force multiplier. Our Guard members can draw from their many skill sets in a way that often allows them to accomplish their mission more efficiently and effectively.

"Our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts are an effort to recognize and fully capitalize on the full spectrum of experiences and capabilities within the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs — both military and civilian — and to figure out the best way to use what our people bring to the table to make our organization better and more effective," Knapp continued. "We serve Wisconsin better when our Department demographics look like Wisconsin, and I think people would be surprised at how closely we actually do mirror the general population in most ways."

Brig. Gen. Matthew Strub, Wisconsin's deputy adjutant general for Army, said the Wisconsin Army National Guard is a better organization with people from multiple backgrounds, experiences and cultures.

"The differences people bring to the discussion helps us all see things from a different lens," he said. "Through the different experiences people have, we can find multiple solutions to the problems and then get to a best possible solution."

Strub acknowledged that the military is built on standards and uniformity, but the SJDEC "will help us create rules, policies and procedures informed by the people we have serving from diverse backgrounds. In our mission to serve the public, the more we resemble the public the more effective we will be."