

Why We Did This Audit

We conducted an assessment of the effect of the pandemic upon the County's workforce by reviewing the implementation of Administrative Orders released during the pandemic with an emphasis on understating the impact to female employees and the intersection of race and gender on equity. The resolution requested that the audit explore the separation and hiring rates of County employees since March of 2020.

What We Recommend

ASD made 4 recommendations that, if implemented, will address the issues raised in the audit. Key items include:

- *DHR review all information available, including those contained in personnel files, exit interviews, and follow-up with direct supervisors to understand why these employees voluntarily separated and come back with a report on the results of this review and targeted retention strategies. DHR should report back to the County Board within one year with results and recommendations on how to increase retention of women of color.*
- *DHR should work with the Office of Corporation Counsel to craft a plan to contact impacted County employees who have unknown listed as their race/ethnicity to request that they update the data. DHR should report back with an updated report on 2021 hiring data as soon as practicable but no later than within one year.*
- *DHR should review employee testimonial excerpts contained in the audit and evaluate whether the proposals could be implemented and studied further and report back to the County Board in six months with the results of the review.*
- *DHR should pull together a pandemic lessons learned from the last two years and issue a guide for future actions including a review of communication of policies to managers and staff.*



June 2022

Minding the Gap: Employee Friendly County Policies Did Not Entirely Stem the Loss of Women of Color During Covid-19 and Will Require Efforts by the County to Achieve its Goal of Racial Equity

BACKGROUND

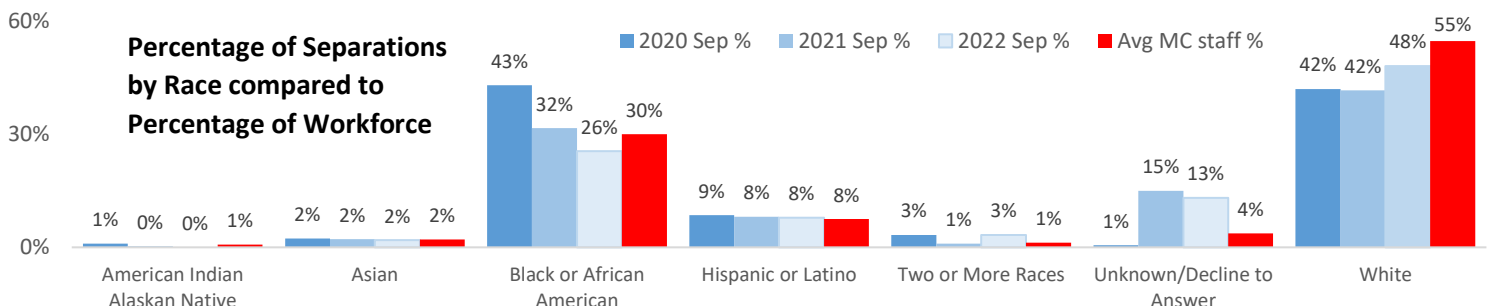
In December 2019, a novel strain of the coronavirus was detected with eventual worldwide spread. In March of 2020, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers declared a public health emergency. At that time, it was anticipated that the impact of Covid-19 would be done by May 2020; however, the pandemic is still an issue in 2022. The Milwaukee County Executive issued administrative orders beginning in March of 2020 relating to Covid-19 and established a Covid-19 supplemental paid leave program. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on labor market metrics for the nation, every state, economic sector, and major demographic group including Milwaukee County. Nationally and in Wisconsin, the disproportionate impact on women and women of color has been widely reported.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Our overall objective was to identify policies designed and enacted by Milwaukee County to assist its employees during the Covid-19 pandemic and to analyze the impact and overall satisfaction and feeling of support these policies had on full time employees with an emphasis on women and women of color.

WHAT WE FOUND

- The County issued 21 Administrative Orders with 77 revisions dealing with Covid Paid Leave, teleworking, facility reopening, travel, mask requirements, vaccine mandate, procedures for responding to symptoms and fiscal mitigation methods.
- The distribution of the overall County workforce by race/ethnicity shows minimal change at the highest level from the start of the pandemic to the first quarter of 2022.
- While national labor force data showed a large exodus during 2020, the County's year with the largest exodus was in 2021.
- 39% of hires in 2021 were listed as having an "unknown" race/ethnicity which hindered analysis. In 2020 this category was 3.7% of all hires and in the first quarter of 2022 it was 6%.
- Employees who identify as Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino separated at a higher rate than their share of the workforce in most years while employees who identify as White separated at a lower rate than their share of the workforce in all periods we reviewed. This is displayed in the graph below. Black or African American females were 24% of the separations while being 20% of the County's workforce.
- The Black or African American race/ethnicity was the largest percentage of all hires at 42% in 2020. The Hispanic or Latino race/ethnicity saw its share increase from 8% in 2020 to 14% in the first quarter of 2022.
- Comparing hires to separations from 2020 to the first quarter of 2022 shows the County with a net loss of 349 employees. 140 were employees who identify as Black or African American and female.
- The use of Covid Paid Leave spiked during the first eight weeks of the pandemic. Overall, employees who identify as Black or African American were 38% of Covid paid time off and were 30% of the workforce. Employees who identify as White were 47% of the Covid paid time off and were 55% of the workforce. The remaining race/ethnicities were within 1% of their workforce share with their Covid Paid leave use.
- Employees who identify as Black or African American were 45% of the School/Child Care hours and are 30% of the workforce. Employees who identify as Hispanic or Latino were 13% of the School/Child Care hours and are 8% of the workforce. Employees who identify as White were 39% of the School/Child Care hours and are 55% of the workforce.
- Hours used by gender were consistent with the County's gender distribution. Analyzing use by type showed the largest gap in the use of PH Close where 62% was used by employees who identify as female. The split by gender for Covid paid leave for employees who identify as White was 62% male.
- Premium and risk recognition pay show use by employees who identify as Black or African American at a higher rate than their share of the workforce but at a rate consistent with their workforce share for eligible positions.
- We interviewed 90 employees about their personal experience during Covid-19. Their stories paint a picture that statistics and administrative orders cannot and offer suggestions to the County to consider.



For more information on this or any of our reports visit <https://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Comptroller/Reports>
 To report County government fraud, waste or abuse call 414-933-7283 or visit <http://county.milwaukee.gov/Audit/Fraud-Reporting-Form.htm>