

7/9/2021

Dear Director Ortega,

Recently the Meat and Poultry Inspection Branch (MPI) was asked to participate in making a statement regarding racial equity. My first reaction was to jump in and talk about the ethnic diversity in the MPI branch. As a member of a minority group myself, I am not only proud of the diverse workforce that I am part of, but of the contribution we bring to the work environment. We are fluent in a variety of languages, personally relating to the different cultures we work with.

MPI could be a poster child for racial diversity. Historically, it has been known for hiring foreign-graduated veterinarians. Until 2011, 10 of our group of 11 veterinarians were immigrants.

Of course, it doesn't take much to understand why veterinary positions with the State of California are having difficulty being filled. New graduates from American veterinary universities with enormous student loans to repay are no longer interested in applying for positions that have such salary disparity, when they can take jobs with other agencies or the private sector, earning significantly more.

I am going to preach to the choir here and repeat what everyone knows: until 2005, salaries of veterinarians that worked for the State of California were historically comparable to the State's engineer salaries. That year, Unit 9 got a raise of 30% but Unit 10 did not. In 2008, some supervisors from CAPS 10 won a like-pay for like-work lawsuit because they did the same work as their counterparts in Unit 9. In 2014, CalHR applied the lawsuit and, for whatever reason that is still not clear, neither rank and file Veterinarians nor MPI Supervisors were included in that raise, even though many who received raises were not doing unit 9-like work.

By not receiving equity in our pay, the administration shows a lack of confidence in our abilities and further, a lack of comprehension in the importance of the job we do. Only a Doctor in Veterinary Medicine can comprehend the risks and have the skills to control diseases that could either devastate California's agricultural system,

causing an economic collapse, or that could expose Californians to direct health threats.

Not too long ago, I learned a new word: 'attrition'. Attrition happens when workers retire or resign and are not replaced. It seems to apply to what I see happening in MPI. In 2001, when I was hired as a Veterinary Medical Officer, we were a total of 11 veterinarians, covering the entire state of California. Currently, despite an increase in our service areas, and added training responsibilities for our customers (previously assigned to a veterinary training coordinator), there are only 6 of those positions remaining. Not a single American-born veterinarian is on our staff roster.

Is it a coincidence that the veterinarians at MPI, who serve the state of California and its citizens, have been overwhelmingly foreign and non-white? Is it a coincidence that these same MPI veterinarians were not included in the like-pay, like-work raise in 2014? It is interesting that as these veterinarians retire and resign, their positions are reclassified by non-veterinary ones at a lesser pay scale. Is this attrition?

Yes, let's talk about race equity and salary equity. Personally, it is hard for me not to see these as related.

Sincerely,

Dr. Everardo Mendes

CDFA: Meat and Poultry Inspection