

How much do Anne Arundel, Annapolis spend on DEI? 'No line item for that'



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When Donald Trump was inaugurated as president on Jan. 20, one of the executive orders he signed terminated “all DEI, DEIA and ‘environmental justice’ offices and positions,” in an attempt to roll back initiatives opposed by the right, which Trump termed “[radical and wasteful](#).”

While the Trump administration’s order was sweeping, the question of exactly what constitutes DEI — in Anne Arundel, this could include set-asides for veterans, translation services and outreach to disabled people — is being answered through numerous court challenges to Trump’s executive order.

According to Anne Arundel and Annapolis leaders, “there’s no line item” for DEI initiatives in their budgets; diversity, equity and inclusion are baked into every agency and office.

However, one diversity-initiative expert called this a political tactic, designed to avoid losing federal funding.

In response to a reader’s inquiry, the Capital Gazette attempted to quantify how much Anne Arundel and Annapolis each spend on DEI. Answering the question proved difficult, in part, because County Executive Steuart Pittman says there’s no way to know how much the county government spends on DEI.

Pittman, an advocate for DEI during his two terms, changed the county’s slogan early in his administration to “The Best Place — For All” and also established the Office of Equity and Human Rights, formerly known as the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Department.

He said efforts to promote DEI are so imbued in the county’s operations that he can’t specify an exact figure.

“With an administration in Washington mistakenly believing that it has a mandate to join the world’s dictators in attacking our institutions, our security apparatus, our economy and the values enshrined in the Constitution of the United States of America, we are called on to defend things that we don’t often think about,” Pittman wrote in his weekly newsletter Feb. 27, in a post on the importance of DEI.

“It is really hard to talk about [DEI] as a line item when it is in fact a management tool, a way of governing and a way of managing county government,” Pittman wrote. “Diversity is just undeniably who we are, and we are a diverse county.”

Pittman said his approach to DEI is as much a cost-saving measure as it is one to ensure the safety of residents. He wants everyone to be given the same opportunities to succeed regardless of difficulty on a case-by-case basis.

But Carl Snowden, convener for the Annapolis-based Caucus for African Americans and a former Annapolis Ward 5 council member, said Pittman’s comment is an attempt to avoid a reduction in or elimination of federal funding.

“Politicians who are in office now have to make a decision,” Snowden said. “How do you deal with the real possibility that federal funding could be threatened?”

“They’re trying to find this equilibrium that on one hand tries to appease the Trump administration, and on the other hand tries to keep those DEI programs going.”

Ensuring diversity in the county

The office of Equity and Human Rights enforces federal, state and local anti-discrimination laws, with a budget of \$958,700 in county funding in the current fiscal year. The county’s total total budget this year is \$2.3 billion.

If anti-discrimination laws are broken, lawsuits, in effect, cost taxpayers money.

Asha Smith, director of the office, said she and her team train government workers and make sure programs comply with anti-discrimination laws.

"We see DEI as a tool in our equal opportunity tool-kit," Smith said. "The law — regardless of what's being said externally right now — is that we have an obligation to advance equal opportunity in our workplace and in access to our programs and services."

DEI in Annapolis

The City of Annapolis does not fund any specific DEI initiatives, Michelle Stephenson, spokesperson for the city, said.

However, the city does provide inclusive employment practices such as paid maternity and paternity leave, handicap accessibility at city office buildings and "a family friendly workplace to allow flexibility for staff that helps with employee retention."

In the current fiscal year, the city provided \$428,750 in grants to 53 organizations that help families improve their quality of life or preserve environmental sustainability, among other things.

Recipients included Chesapeake Bay Region Accessible Boating, which provides therapeutic sailing to people with disabilities, Blacks of the Chesapeake and Maryland Latinos Unidos, both of which work with minority populations, among others.

"The point of the funding is to help Annapolis residents," Victoria Buckland, deputy city manager, said in a February interview.

Annapolis Mayor Gavin Buckley, a Democrat, declined to comment on the city's DEI efforts.

Some of those who receive city funding don't feel these programs should be considered DEI initiatives.

Joe Toolan, board chair for Annapolis Pride, says that he doesn't consider "things like supporting human rights and human needs as DEI" and praised the support his organization — and other equity efforts — has received from the city and Anne Arundel County.

Annapolis Pride, an LGBTQ+ advocacy group, received \$7,000 from the city this fiscal year to launch a new [website](#) focused on the LGBTQ+ community.

"When you talk about 'DEI' initiatives, the goal is really to make sure that everyone has the ability to live their lives really and authentically as themselves," Toolan said. "We know that our community remains under attack, and so our goals continue to remain the same, to make sure that we're saving people's lives."

Buckley won the 2017 mayoral election over then-incumbent Republican Mike Pantelides after running on a platform of environmental justice, fiscal responsibility and unity. He began his second successful campaign touting Annapolis as a ["forward thinking, strong and inclusive" city that's "more sustainable, more accessible and better connected."](#)

In terms of hiring practices, Stephenson says all positions in city government are "filled on merit" but that Buckley has "... sought out highly qualified candidates that reflect the make-up of our community when vacancies arise."

Snowden says that DEI is more than just hiring practices — "it's a value."

"In the city of Annapolis, we've got the most diversified Annapolis Police Department that we've ever had," Snowden said, adding that there are more women in positions of power in Anne Arundel County government than ever before, as well as openly gay men and women. "Those are measurements of how far we've come," he said.

Pittman said despite Trump facing legal challenges over his efforts to dismantle DEI efforts across the federal government, he remains uneasy about federal funding for the county.

"Of course it concerns me," Pittman said. "That's why it's so important to explain what we're talking about. To the extent that the public supports embracing our diversity, being inclusive and practicing equity, it emboldens Congress to support it and the courts to support it."

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