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Affirmative Action Council Awards DWD Highest Honor

Labor Secretary Gassman accepts 2008 Annual Diversity Award, third honor in her tenure

MADISON – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today received the 2008 Annual Diversity Award, the State Council on Affirmative Action's highest award, presented to DWD in recognition of its diverse workforce and career opportunities for women, minorities and people with disabilities.

For the third time in Secretary Gassman's tenure, DWD has won the Council's top award for a major state agency. The department was previously honored in 2006 and 2004. A member of Governor Doyle's Cabinet, Secretary Gassman has led the agency since 2003, longer than any of her predecessors.

"This award reflects our strong commitment to foster diversity and set an example for employers throughout the state," Secretary Gassman said. "Under Governor Doyle's leadership, we strive to make Wisconsin a state where all can succeed, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or background. We need the skills, talent, energy and contributions of everyone to grow our economy and prosper. At DWD, we seek the most talented, capable people. Diversity is not so much the goal as it is the result of our efforts, and we celebrate the results."

In a letter of congratulations, the Council and the Office of State Employment Relations recognized DWD for its workforce diversity and its opportunities for upward mobility for women, racial/ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. From July 2007 to July 2008, employment of these three groups within the department remained consistently higher than the statewide average for all employers and their representation in the available workforce. The Council and OSER also said DWD had a higher percentage of reclassifications and promotional opportunities than the statewide average, underscoring its successful recruitment and retention efforts.

"These efforts demonstrate a sincere commitment to diversity and equity," OSER Director Jennifer Donnelly and Council Chair James Parker said in their letter. "Moreover, your success provides a benchmark for other agencies when developing their plans and programs to serve our diverse communities."

Of the approximately 1,900 DWD employees in June, nearly two-thirds were women, about 65 percent, compared to the statewide employment average of 51 percent and labor force representation of 47 percent. In addition to Secretary Gassman, JoAnna Richard is Deputy Secretary. Women also are administrators of four of the agency's six divisions.

Overall, 17 percent of the Department's employees are minorities compared to the statewide employment average of 9 percent and the labor force representation of 11 percent. Minorities hold four top administrative positions. Employees with disabilities represented more than 11 percent, compared to the statewide employment average of 6 percent.

In the past year, 17 individuals moved to higher positions within DWD. Eleven were women, and one of the 11 was a minority.