

Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District settles challenge to workforce diversity agreement

By Bryce Gray St. Louis Post-Dispatch Jan 25, 2018

The Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District announced a settlement Thursday with parties that alleged the utility defaulted on its agreement aiming to ensure adequate diversity among its workforce and contractors.

The agreement in question, known as the Community Benefit Agreement, or CBA, was established in 2013 — a year after the utility conducted a “disparity study” that helped identify deficiencies in diversity. The agreement focused on facilitating training of diverse workers and firms, with whom MSD could partner or employ. The utility later set separate goals of using a certain percentage of minorities and women to make up its labor and services .

Thursday’s settlement addressed allegations that arose in 2015, when signatories of the CBA alleged that certain conditions were not being met by MSD. Contracts signed before the CBA are now subject to it.

“All parties are working together to ensure full satisfaction at all levels with MSD’s Diversity Program as we stay on track to meet the requirements of the CBA,” said a joint statement issued on behalf of Brian Hoelscher, MSD’s executive director, and Adolphus Pruitt, branch president of the St. Louis City NAACP.

Looking ahead, the utility said it will perform an updated disparity study at the end of 2018. “Based on current results, we believe there will be very few areas where we are not meeting utilization goals,” the statement said. “The areas where MSD is short on participation — such as female construction workers — is also being experienced by many others in the region.”

This article was updated at 9:30 a.m. on January 26 to clarify that the content of the CBA is separate from MSD's goals for diverse hiring.