

St. Louis alderman aims to reinforce construction contract rules for women, minorities

By [Ashley Lisenby](#) • Mar 7, 2018
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St. Louis Alderman Jeffrey Boyd, Ward 22, wants city residents, women and people of color to have a fair shot at city construction contracts.

Boyd and representatives from city contract boards advocated for his proposed measure, BB 270, on Tuesday. It would refine and enforce rules already in place that require contractors to consider women and minorities for work.

Boyd said he wants to treat those groups fairly.

“There are barriers for some contractors to do work with the city of St. Louis. And so, how do we overcome those barriers? We must put systems in place to mitigate certain opportunities for people to game the system,” he told the Legislation Committee, which heard arguments for and against the bill.

The measure calls for contractors to hire subcontractors in line with these proportions:

- 21 percent African-American
- 11 percent women
- 2 percent Hispanic
- 0.5 percent Asian and Native American

Contractors who don't fulfill minimum requirements, including proving that they are attempting, in good faith, to hire people of color and women, could be subject to penalties, including paying damages and not being able to get bids for projects for a year.

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Boyd's proposal also outlines ways to increase training and certification for minority- and women-owned businesses.

But contractors who spoke at Tuesday's hearing argued the bill is too restrictive and parts of it did not make logistical sense.

Associated General Contractors of Missouri chair William Wagner said his intent in speaking up against the bill was not to short change minority businesses and workers. He said hiring a diverse workforce actually benefits companies.

Wagner, and others who opposed the measure, called on committee members to refrain from eliminating a 72-hour period that he said allows contractors to assess bids and talk more with subcontractors about bid details.

Boyd, and others who support the measure, said the waiting period allows contractors to low-ball minority-owned enterprises or back out of preliminary contracts that hire them.

Construction-business owner Brian Murphy told the committee that he believes there should be more efforts to increase the number of eligible minority-owned businesses by preparing them to do businesses with general contractors on large projects.

“Those are the sorts of things that are going to make sure that we have another 10 or 15 or 20 more minority businesses over the next few years that are gonna survive,” he said.

The measure passed out of committee Tuesday and awaits full board consideration.