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ACE Newsletter

**A Periodic Publication of Wisconsin's Association of Career Employees
December 10, 2021**

By Jack Lawton, Board Member

An Unusual 2021 State Compensation Plan Proposal

This newsletter is an update on the progress, or lack thereof, on the current State biennial Compensation Plan. The plan determines all of the compensation provisions for nonrepresented employees including the General Wage Adjustment (GWA) and a wide range of detailed benefits for individual job classifications and groups of classifications. In addition to providing wage increases and related provisions for current state employees, the Plan also serves as one of the State's most important tools for attracting and retaining competent employees.

After you read this information, ACE urges you to contact your legislators to support the Compensation Plan and encourage the legislature and the Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER) to meet and act in time for it to take effect by January, 2022.

The Compensation Plan Process

Traditionally the development and enactment of the plan has been a pretty sleepy affair for anybody who wasn't directly involved. The plan development involves gathering

information from the various state agencies, labor market studies and administrative system reports to identify compensation issues needing attention. By definition, the total projected cost of the entire plan must stay within the limits of the money budgeted for the compensation reserve and available from other funding sources for individual state agencies that don't rely entirely on General Purpose Revenue (GPR).

Usually at some point after each budget is passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor, DOA's Division of Personnel Management (DPM) develops a proposed Compensation Plan and waits for the Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER) to formally request it. Typically this happens shortly after the budget has been signed, the Committee then passes the plan with few changes, and the Compensation Plan takes effect on, or shortly after, the beginning of the first fiscal year of the biennium without further legislative action.

The 2019 process took a very different and unpredictable course. During that cycle, JCOER did not request the plan submission until November and failed to hold a meeting until December 18, 2019. To further complicate things, JCOER substantially rewrote the proposal with very little obvious reason and provided no public explanation. The few people who registered to speak in favor of the original proposal, including ACE, were left entirely in the dark as to the contents of the amended version, which was adopted on a party line vote.

Contents of the Proposed 2021-23 Compensation Plan

This year, perhaps due to JCOER's reluctance to address the subject, DPM submitted the proposed Plan to the Committee on its own initiative (see the [DPM Letter to JCOER](#), the [DPM Summary](#) and the [full text](#)). JCOER has not yet scheduled a meeting to act on the Plan and we may not find out when it will occur until the last possible minute, as happened two years ago.

General Wage Adjustment

The proposed Compensation Plan contains a 2% General Wage Adjustment during each year of the biennium.

Pay Range and Salary Progression Adjustments

The Plan also includes a number of pay range adjustments, salary progression, and related provisions for specific classifications targeted due to recruitment/retention issues. A few of the approximately 130 changes to the last plan include:

- Market and parity increases for engineers at the Department of Transportation, customer service positions at Employee Trust Funds and nursing and related health care positions at multiple agencies.
- Market increases for blue collar and administrative support positions.
- Additional increases for Correctional Officers and Sergeants, Psychiatric Care Technicians-Advanced, Youth Counselors-Advanced, Nurse Clinician 2s, Nursing Assistants, Resident Care Technicians, and Police and Wardens.
- A referral bonus program for employees at 24/7 institutions in the Department of Corrections, Department of Health Services and the Department of Veteran Affairs.
- Continuation of the retention payments for protective service employees within the Departments of Corrections and Health Services.

"Companion" Bill

What is unusual this time is that full implementation of the Plan requires more funding than what was included in the compensation reserve in the 2021-23 biennial budget. The additional funding is requested in a proposed companion bill, which was drafted and submitted to JCOER along with the proposed Compensation Plan but has not yet been introduced in either house.

This extraordinary measure was proposed in an attempt to address the larger nationwide trends of accelerating loss of employees and a concurrent lack of qualified applicants for those same jobs. These trends are reflected in the following statistics from the State of Wisconsin Classified Workforce and Affirmative Action Report for 2019 and 2020, which showed exceptionally high vacancy rates in Veterans Affairs (31.2%), Health Services (12.8%), Corrections (12.7%), and Administration (12.6%).

The Compensation Plan provisions that would be enabled by the bill include:

- Increasing each progression pay point by \$5.00 per hour for Correctional Officers, Sergeants, Youth Counselors and Psychiatric Technicians.
- Accelerated and increased progression points for Nurse Clinician 2s.
- A \$2.00 per hour add-on for Correctional Officers, Sergeants and Youth Counselors in

the larger correctional institutions with severe vacancy problems.

- An increase of \$2.00 for existing market equity adjustments for Nurse Clinician 3s and 4s.
- Increasing the minimum for pay ranges 5-31 and 5-32 by \$5.00 beyond the 2% GWA. This applies to the Correctional Officer, Correctional Sergeant, Psychiatric Care Tech, Psychiatric Care Tech-Adv, Youth Counselor and Youth Counselor Advanced classifications.
- Accelerating and increasing the Nurse Clinician pay progression.

Other funds are provided for District Attorney and Public Defender pay raises to correct errors in the current budget. The pay of those positions is set directly in the budget instead of via the Compensation Plan.

The bill draft also specifically addresses critical and completely separate issues that need substantial new funding to comply with the "Maintenance of Effort" requirements established in the Federal Covid laws. Without this funding, the State would have to refund a huge amount of grants to the Federal government. It's a bit strange to see these items combined with State compensation provisions, but perhaps the mix of issues will attract more support from Republicans.

- Local school aids: increase to \$742 per pupil in the 2019-20 and 2020-20 school years, \$758 in 2021-22 and \$777 thereafter.
- Special education aid: \$17,176,100
- UW System operations: \$11,982,200
- State aids for technical colleges: \$2,662,700

The chances of getting legislative approval for the Compensation Plan and its companion bill are unknown at this point. It is also unclear how language in the Compensation Plan can be crafted to allow the plan to be enacted before the companion legislation is passed and signed. Hopefully this legislative process won't delay the approval of the Compensation Plan.

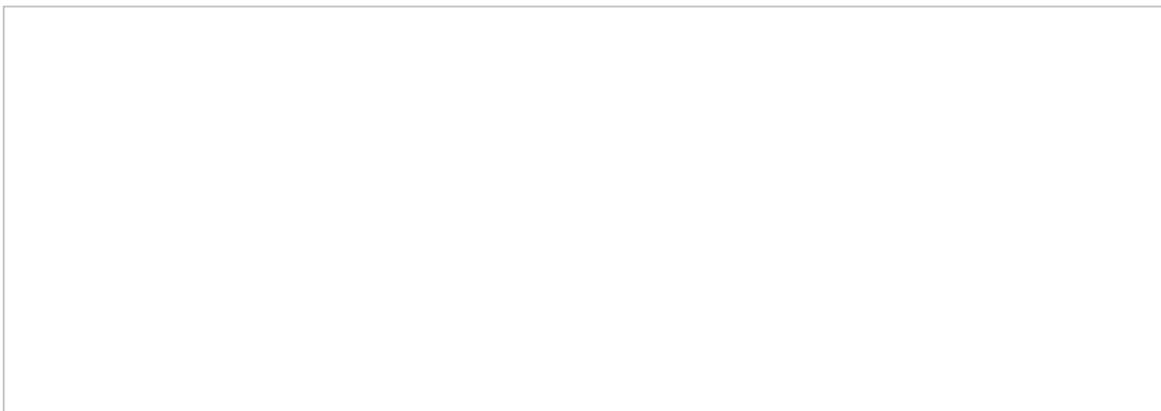
In Conclusion

The Compensation Plan is overdue and its future is anything but assured. The proposed pay and funding increases are positive as far as they go, as is the recognition that serious change is needed to address the underlying causes that hamper workforce recruitment and retention in Wisconsin State service. Yet positive as they are, these measures are unlikely to have a major effect on vacancy rates for correctional officers, nurses, and other critical jobs where challenging working conditions exacerbate the problems associated with low pay. Keep in mind that the rest of the State workforce faces many of the same kinds of challenges, just not as extreme.

Following the text of this newsletter is a copy of the letter that ACE has sent to JCOER in support of the proposed Compensation Plan. ACE will continue to pay close attention to the progress that is made on the Compensation Plan and the decisions affecting State employees' pay and benefits.

Please let us know of any compensation-related or other issues you feel that ACE should address. Send your thoughts to ace@wiscow.com.

ACE Letter to the Joint Committee on Employment Relations





ACE

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December 6, 2021

Joint Committee on Employment Relations
Co-Chairs and Members
Room 113 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Joint Committee on Employment Relations Co-Chairs and Members:

The Association of Career Employees (ACE) has advocated for fair compensation for state employees since the 1970s. The ACE Board members strongly believe in compensation which reflects that for equivalent positions in the private sector and adequate compensation when there are not equivalent positions. We believe this facilitates hiring in accordance with merit based civil service recruiting methods and assures that the state of Wisconsin is served by the best and most qualified employees. Therefore, we are taking the opportunity to comment on the 2021-2023 State of Wisconsin Compensation Plan.

The proposed Compensation Plan is unusual this time in that it attempts to address several extraordinary problems that reflect nation-wide trends of accelerating loss of employees and a concurrent lack of qualified applicants for those same jobs. Because of limitations built into the compensation reserve fund, the only effective action to help solve the problems necessitates additional funding through a companion bill that would address critical agency staffing needs in the Departments of Health Services, Corrections, and Veterans Affairs for security and nursing positions. The companion bill also includes a legislative fix to a budgeting error related to funding for pay progression of the State Public Defenders' Office and the District Attorney's Office. ACE strongly supports this request.

We also support a proposed General Wage Adjustment (GWA) of 2.0% in January of each fiscal year and urge the Committee to meet and approve the compensation plan in time to be able to make such payments by January 2, 2022. In addition, satisfactorily performing non-represented attorneys who are eligible to receive progression adjustments according to s 230.12(10), Wis. Stat., or Section C of the Plan are required to receive at least the 2.0% provided to each agency by the 2021-2023 Biennial Budget.

We are pleased to see the pay administration and/or progression provisions for critical classifications where vacancy rates have been high and recruitment difficult such as Correctional Officers/Sergeants, Psychiatric Care Technicians/Advanced, Youth Counselors/Advanced, Nurse Clinician 2s, Nursing Assistants, Resident Care Technicians, and Police and Wardens. We support creation of a referral bonus program for certain agencies and continuation of the retention payments for protective service employees within the Departments of Corrections and Health Services. *The State of Wisconsin Classified Workforce and Affirmative Action Report for 2019 and 2020* showed an exceptionally high vacancy rate in Veterans Affairs of 31.2%, amounting to nearly 400 vacant positions in June 2020. The next highest vacancy rates among agencies with at least 20 positions were Health Services (12.8%), Corrections (12.7%), and Administration (12.6%).

We support market increases funded by the Compensation Reserve for blue collar and administrative support positions as a service-based stratification and agency-funded market. We also support parity increases responsive to unique labor market issues or recruitment and retention needs, including but not limited to, the engineers at the Department of Transportation, customer service positions at Employee Trust Funds, and nursing and related health care positions at multiple agencies.

Sincerely,
Sally Drew
President, Association of Career Employees

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