



COUNTY OF ERIE CITIZENS SALARY REVIEW COMMISSION MINUTES

Tuesday, January 30, 2024 Meeting #5

Present: Chair Lauri Buonanno, Alex Burgos, Mark Glasgow, David Pietrowski, Greg Rabb, Christopher Stone, Fred Floss (joined virtually at 2:15).

Absent: Gary Dickson, William Ransom

Support Staff: Mark Cornell, Lindsay McKay, and Natalie Nitsche.

Non-Members Present: Nathan Lippit

Meeting Notes: A quorum was present and meeting called to order by Chair Buonanno at 2:00pm.

Due to some technical difficulties with the WebEx meeting, there was an approximately 15-minute pause to the meeting.

Chair Buonanno discussed the prior meeting's minutes. C. Stone motioned to accept the amended minutes, and A. Burgos seconded the motion. All in favor of accepting the amended minutes.

Next, Chair Buonanno asked F. Floss why he believes county budget should be used a comparison metric to other counties. F. Floss stated that Monroe and Albany Counties are a different size and offer different social services than Erie County, but the total budget will take all of that into account. Chair Buonanno would also like to include population as a metric and inquired as to which counties are going to be compared – Erie, Monroe, Onondaga, and Albany Counties? F. Floss believes the "big five" for some metrics but all counties for others.

F. Floss then discussed a document he compiled from census data. The spreadsheet allows for the analysis of growth in wages, by county, for both legislators and legislative staff all over New York State from 2000 through 2023. Chair Buonanno specifically inquired about Column R. F. Floss advised that this number was derived by taking the salaries of employees at the executive and legislative branches, adding them up, and then dividing them by the total number of employees. Numbers can also be pulled related to the private sector. This can show, year to year, how the average salary grows. Chair Buonanno agreed that this was good information to review at the macro level, but the Committee needs the specific salaries. M. Cornell advised that we are only looking at the "big five," that is manageable to get the specific salaries.

G. Rabb inquired as to which five counties are referred to as the "big five." Chair Buonanno stated that refers to Erie, Monroe, Onondaga, Albany, and Westchester.

Based on F. Floss' explanation, Chair Buonanno asked the Committee if there were any objections to F. Floss' analysis being the introduction for the Committee's analysis portion of the report. It will show the big picture – whether Erie County is growing at a slower or higher rate than the rest of the state.

C. Strone stated that during the interview of the majority caucus, the group suggested using the formula for minimum wage in 1996 versus minimum wage in 2024 to determine what their pay should be - \$82,500 was suggested. D. Pietrowski indicated this was not necessarily the most accurate answer they could give; they did not have the questions ahead of time to truly analyze the answer. Chair Buonanno stated that the Legislators started with a very large base in 1996 at \$42,000, and it is still \$42,000 today. A. Burgos asserted that there were more legislative districts in 1996, and Chair Buonanno confirmed the same. A. Burgos confirmed that because the number of legislators has decreased, the constituency has increased.

Chair Buonanno asked F. Floss to take his data and put it into a graph to show whether Erie County's wages have increased compared to statewide and the "big five."

M. Cornell confirmed Erie County's Department of Budget and Management would provide salaries for the elected officials in the "big five" for 2024 as well as the budgets of the legislators and the number of legislators. Chair Buonanno asked the Committee to recall that Westchester was thrown out last meeting. G. Rabb asked for the numbers to be reflected with and without Westchester County. Chair Buonanno confirmed with F. Floss that the data requested is (1) Erie County, (2) All Counties, (3) the big five, and (4) the big four for 2000 to the present. F. Floss also suggested calculating the wage growth for the total population. Chair Buonanno asked F. Floss to also provide details on the public sector, the private sector, and a combination of both – the three analyses will be (1) executive/legislative/general government, (2) everyone in private sector, (3) everyone who is employed living in the county. Chair Buonanno confirmed the Committee's agreement.

F. Floss advised the minority caucus wanted the Committee to also review benefits. Mr. Floss stated that he can pull information from 2021 to the present from Bureau of Economic Analysis to include wages and benefits. A percentage of benefits will be calculated for each county for each of the three areas (government, private, and total). The minority caucus was worried that public sector employees have low salaries and high benefits.

Next, D. Pietrowski discussed his analysis on ten counties for two periods of time: 2021 and 2018. The goal of this examination is to determine the cost of the legislature – the population of the counties, the population per legislator, the salary for each, the total pool of the cost of legislators, and if each of these counties only had 11 legislators, what is the cost per legislator. Because we have too few legislators, comparatively, this could be a good metric. Erie County has the fourth largest population, the least amount of legislators, the highest population per legislator, third highest salary, ninth in the total pool of cost. If all of the counties had 11 legislators, Erie County would be at the bottom. Erie County's cost is \$468,000. Monroe county's total cost is almost double.

D. Pietrowski inquired about the Legislature not being included in the 2018 salary recommendations. Chair Buonanno discussed that, during interviews, the Legislature was adamant they did not want a raise. M. Cornell advised that if the Legislature would like to adopt something other than the Committee's recommendation with a super-majority vote.

D. Pietrowski asked if the legislators in other counties are considered part time, and asked if legislators in other counties get full time benefits like they do in Erie County. Chair Buonanno advised that could be law but should be looked into. M. Cornell confirmed that according to the County's payroll system, they are considered full time; they get full-time pension and full-time benefits. Chair Buonanno asked if there is anyone else in a payroll run that is on the cusp of full time or part time. M. Cornell confirmed the legislators are the only ones. M. Cornell stated, "if someone gets a full-time pension credit, they are full time." Chair Buonanno agrees.

Chair Buonanno suggested using this chart in the final report. No objections.

Next. Chair Buonanno suggested discussing the interviews. C. Stone and D. Pietrowski interviewed the majority caucus, and G. Rabb and F. Floss interviewed the minority caucus.

C. Stone reviewed that the majority caucus feels all of the elected officials are underpaid and that they put in a lot of hours – answering constituent questions on personal time. D. Pietrowski asked if there is a limit on outside income. There was a discussion regarding New York State pension cap at \$37,000 and being under 67 years old. M. Cornell advised it also affects Social Security.

G. Rabb then discussed the minority caucus' response to the first question. Mr. Rabb feels that the minority caucus is opposed to a raise, because this is a public service. F. Floss stated that the only elected official they believed should get a raise is the Sheriff. F. Floss stated that there was also concern about first deputies making more than the principals. They were more suggesting lowering the salaries of those below them. M. Cornell confirmed the legislative staff all make significantly more than the legislators.

Chair Buonanno confirms that the majority caucus thinks everyone should get a raise, the minority caucus thinks only the Sheriff should get a raise, and the minority thinks those under them should make less. F. Floss asserted it was more theoretical; they were not suggesting taking money away. F. Floss stated that the minority caucus was adamant about not effectuating a COLA. The majority caucus also discussed steps.

Chair Buonanno moved to the questions of full time versus part time. G. Rabb stated that the minority caucus treat it as a full-time job. F. Floss stated the minority caucus said it was somewhere in between full time and part time. The minority stated they do not do this job for the money, but as a public service. G. Rabb discussed staffing as well. The minority also expressed concern about a cap being put on outside income.

C. Stone stated that Chair Baskin believes she is full time and is willing to share her calendar. D. Pietrowski stated that Legislator Johnson also feels he is full time. Everyone else said they were part time. D. Pietrowski discussed that only a certain type of full-time employment would allow you to be a legislator. D. Pietrowski advised that the majority shared the sentiment that they do not want to have any restrictions put on outside work.

Chair Buonanno confirmed both the minority and the majority caucuses expressed concern on any caps or restrictions on outside income or work. F. Floss stated that the minority caucus recognizes that some people cannot run for office due to their full-time jobs but do not feel that this will impact the quality of people that can run.

D. Pietrowski presented the next questions: if this position was full time, would you be willing to give up outside employment? Some Legislators said that \$82,500 was the number, and others said they would think about it. G. Rabb mentioned that one of the legislators considers the work to be full time and is insulted by the insinuation it is part time. The minority is also not convinced that the leaders and chair should get an extra stipend.

Next, D. Pietrowski asked if there was any additional pay for committee assignments. M. Cornell advised there is no extra pay. There was a question about a stipend for ECMC – it was established that there is no stipend for being on the Board at ECMC. D. Pietrowski advised there was a question about a gas/mileage stipend. Chair Buonanno asked if there were any questions about cellphones.

Question four relates to if a higher compensation would attract a larger pool of candidates. C. Stone and D. Pietrowski reported that the majority caucus believes it would attract more people. G. Rabb states that the minority caucus feels that the salary is not a drawing force.

G. Rabb wanted to make sure that benefits be considered in our recommendation. Chair Buonanno confirmed the Committee will consider benefits for all elected officials, not just the Legislature. A. Burgos inquired about pension contributions by the County. M. Cornell discussed deferred compensation and that there is no matching.

Motion to adjourn by A. Burgos; M. Glasgow seconded motion.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 6, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.