



Tuesday, November 15, 2022, Meeting Minutes  
Radisson Gateway, 18118 International Blvd, Seattle  
Zoom – Meeting ID: 821 8411 3484

The meeting of the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials was brought to order by Steven, Chair, at 6:02 p.m.

Steven read a land acknowledgement, stating the Commissioners are meeting in the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land of the Duwamish and Muckleshoot Peoples. The Commission acknowledges and respects the Indigenous individuals and communities who live on this land now, and those who were forcibly removed from their homelands. In offering this land acknowledgement, the Commission affirms Indigenous sovereignty, and thanks them for sharing their lands, history, and experiences with the Commission.

**Commission Members Present:**

Carli – via Zoom  
Diana – via Zoom  
Ellen – via Zoom  
Eric  
Eve  
Greg – via Zoom  
Jon, Vice Chair  
Karen  
Kirsten  
Lancer – via Zoom

Linda  
Scott – via Zoom  
Steven, Chair  
Sue – via Zoom  
Tray – via Zoom

**Commission Members Excused:**

Wendy

**Staff Present:**

Teri Wright, Executive Director  
Lindsay Matthews, Executive Assistant

Teri took roll call.

Steven read the meeting opening statement.

Lindsay went over meeting folders and their contents.

**Jon moved to approve the October 11 and 12, 2022, meeting minutes. Kirsten seconded.**  
The motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

### **Public Testimony**

After reading the procedure for public testimony, Steven welcomed David Heller who had signed up for public testimony. David introduced himself and gave a brief history. He has been a lawyer for 40 years and his wife is a Superior Court Judge. David shared his lived experience with a spouse that works for the Superior court, she often works more than a 40-work week and even works while on vacation. He believes the current salary increase is not enough because over the years the salary increases have not kept up with the cost of living. He is also concerned that the recruitment and retention is not what it once was. He feels that the salary for the position should be commensurate with the responsibilities.

Eric asked: With your experience what salary should a Judge make? David replied he wasn't prepared for that question, but he does know that the salary hasn't kept up with inflation over time, not just the current crazy inflation but inflation over the years. He would like to see a significant raise to get the ball rolling, then try keeping up with inflation.

Jon added his experience with a spouse that was on the bench. He said that the Commission has taken the things David spoke about into consideration and that is how they came up with the current proposed salary schedule.

Steven quoted David, "the uniformity of quality is not there anymore", Steven continued that he is curious, what about the Justices makes David feel this way? Is it education, life experience, or something else? David replied: In his opinion a good Judge listens to everyone, makes rulings that follow the law, grasps the law (which is really complicated sometimes), makes fair decisions, works with integrity no matter who it helps and who it hurts. David added that sometimes Judges have biases, sometimes Judges don't seem to grasp the issues, for example when a lawyer loses a case and the Judge can't explain why they lost, it makes him wonder how the decision was made. Steven clarified, if for example, it used to be that more Justices had experience at major law firms than now, you could surmise that the salaries they are making at the private law firms are so satisfactory they would not give that up. If it's that they are coming with little prior experience to the courts, haven't appeared in court much, or have been appointed to fill a vacancy, then that is something different. Those are things the Commission struggles with. David added that if you are a good lawyer and you aspire to be a Judge, you will be making a sacrifice to serve in that capacity. No one goes into public service to get rich. He added, when is the sacrifice too great? When the salary doesn't keep up with inflation.

Steven thanked David Heller for his testimony and welcomed any other thoughts.

Steven welcomed the next speaker Debra Stephens, from the Supreme court. Justice Stephens clarified that the judiciary is hopeful to make up ground from the last salary session where the increases didn't keep up with inflation. She shared her experience, in reference to filling open Justice positions in the past. There were many people willing to serve, versus now, they are struggling to fill positions. Justice Stephens said she is hearing from potential justices that it's not just accepting a lower salary, it is accepting that the salary is not keeping up with the cost of living over time. She stated the reason the judiciary is requesting a 10% increase and a COLA (cost of living adjustment) for 2023, and a COLA for 2024 is to make up for not keeping pace with inflation from the last salary session. Justice Stephens called attention to the affects that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the last salary session and budget session in general, she said that state employees received about a 12% increase while the Elected Officials in the judiciary are in the hole due to not keeping up with what the state employees received or inflation.

Steven thanked Justice Debra Stephens for her testimony.

Commissioners moved into a work session. Teri brought attention the preliminary November Revue Forecast. She said at the December meeting she would have the final November Revenue Forecast and that will be the last forecast before the final salary setting meeting in February. Steven asked if Commissioners had any questions or needed any more information. Discussion ensued. Jon asked if the Commission could ask Dr. Steve Lerch for an update in December and again in February. Teri replied that she will ask Dr. Lerch.

Steven asked if there was any more testimony from guests. Judge Samuel Chung said he'd like to add a few things. Steven welcomed Judge Samuel Chung.

Judge Samuel Chung, from the Superior Court, gave a short work history. He spoke about the difficulties in recruiting and retention in the Judiciary.

Judge Rebecca Robertson, from the King County District Court, gave a short work history. She added her perspective of the difficulties in recruiting and retention. Judge Robertson also explained how things have changed during the last couple years in her court. She thanked the Commissioners for their service.

Linda mentioned that she saw no uncontested judicial races in Thurston County. Jon added that this is not the normal election cycle. Kirsten said there only one contested position in the judicial race in Whatcom County out of four or five positions. Jon added that his ballot had two contested positions of the three in King County. Scott added that in Spokane County there were six judicial races, and only two of the six were contested positions. Discussion ensued.

Steven thanked the people that gave testimony and asked if there was any other business that needed to be discussed prior to adjournment.

**The meeting was adjourned by Steven at 6:53 p.m.**



Jon, Vice Chair

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12/14/2022

Date

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