

State Employee Compensation Oversight Commission

Presentation by Mark Wendland

June 25th, 2007

I would like to thank the Commission for allowing me to present today; on a subject that I have been hoping would be addressed ever since I started working for the State. My presentation today will be an informal one with a focus on my personal experience, not because I am a special case, but because I think my experiences with State employment are, unfortunately all too typical. I will be brief, since I know everyone is eager for lunch.

I am a licensed Professional Engineer, graduating in 1982 with a degree in Architectural Engineering from Kansas State University. I was born and raised in Kansas and, except for two years in Kansas City, Missouri, I have lived in Kansas all my life.

After graduating from K-State then working for 10 years as a consulting engineer, I accepted the Chief Engineer for the University of Kansas Medical Center, my first State position. During my time there my position was unclassified, and although the salary was not quite market rate, they had an excellent retirement plan and more important for my growing family, regular hours. "Regular hours" are typically not in the vocabulary of the engineering consulting field.

For family reasons a move to Topeka was desirable and in 1996 I accepted a position with the Department of Architectural Services as an Engineering Project Manager. This position was classified, and titled Building Systems Engineer III, the highest position I am aware of for a facility engineer in the classified pay system.

For the next six years I worked as an Engineering Project Manager reviewing and managing literally hundreds of projects all across the State, ranging in size from a few thousand dollars to tens of millions. My duties were similar to a Senior Engineer or even partner level in the private consulting world.

During those six years, the salary gap between employment with the State and the private sector grew wider. Despite the fact that I received exceptional job performance reviews, attempts to close the salary gap by the department director were unsuccessful.

Although I enjoyed my job immensely, in 2002 I left State employment for private consulting and received an immediate 25% raise. As I understand it, my previous position with the state was never filled, although attempts were made. Salary scale was apparently the biggest barrier.

Approximately four and a half years after I left, the Department of Architectural Services (now called Facilities Planning) advertised for a position very similar to the one I previously held. Due to the departure of two other engineers in the department, the new position had some additional responsibilities and some salary flexibility. I interviewed and was hired as a Senior Engineer Planning/Compliance, the position I currently hold. This position is still listed as a Building Systems Engineer III in the classified system, but I was able to negotiate a salary that was close to the amount I was making in the consulting field.

My position may be somewhat unique in that I have a lot of responsibility, making decisions every day that can cost, or save the State tens of thousands of dollars, but I don't supervise any State employees. I do, in fact, effectively supervise dozens of different engineers and architects except they work for private consultants. I am unaware of any method in the current pay system to account for my situation.

Even additional supervisory duties are not a guarantee that additional compensation is offered. I know of State employees who were forced to absorb additional duties when staffing was reduced, yet were not offered any kind of upgrade in their pay scale.

There is a common joke bantered around by State employees, "you have to quit a state job then get rehired to get a raise". I have found that "joke" true in my case and I am aware of other individuals in the same situation, including moving between State agencies. This "joke" costs the State money, resources and time, as well as valuable employees that may not come back, all because there is no flexibility in the system.

I am sure there are other positions in the State similar to mine, professionals that have high levels of responsibility, but few or no direct supervisory duties. There are also personnel that are in positions that require months, if not years of training and experience with a particular job to operate effectively and efficiently. Any one of the four proposals under consideration would have allowed the flexibility in the pay system to address these circumstances.

1. Number of Pay Plans
 - a. Plans can be tailored to meet specific needs of a particular agency, especially agencies that use professionals or highly trained personnel.
2. Structure of Pay Grades
 - a. Allowing movement within a pay grade allows flexibility to meet market conditions will enhance the ability of the agencies to retain personnel.
3. Basis of Employee Pay
 - a. Employees should be paid on their work performance, education and skills, i.e.: value to the State, much like private market conditions. Longevity should be rewarded with additional vacation time, and other non-monetary benefits. Basing pay on longevity breeds complacency, and a "rocking chair" mentality.
4. Pay Administration
 - a. Equity should be based on market value for particular skill sets and experience. Allowing agencies to have different pay plans may increase competition between agencies for personnel. This would lead to more employee movement between agencies which cost the State money and resources. However, it would also help identify which agencies are doing a good job of managing people and which agencies are not.

With any of the proposed plans I am sure some employees are worried about favoritism or unfairness in the system. That problem exists in all employment systems. The way to combat this is by doing a better job of promoting/hiring and training managers and making them accountable. A system of assessing the managers by employees could be utilized to help minimize these concerns.

Trying to prevent all possible injustices in the pay system through strict rules and an inflexible pay structure only serves to reward those who just want a job with the State at the expense of those employees who truly are dedicated and take pride in their vocation, whatever that may be.

One last comment, the Dept. of Human Resources should monitor employment conditions on a yearly basis to insure that salaries are kept current without waiting until individuals quit before spending tremendous resources to hire and train new individuals. If they wait too long between reviews and the gap gets to wide, the legislature can't keep up with the necessary funding.

Again I thank you for your time and attention. I believe the State is headed in the right direction with this Commission, and review of the State employee compensation. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.