

## Laura Hurley

---

**From:** Robt. B. Taylor <rbt.adkinspotts@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 2, 2021 8:35 AM  
**To:** dallas1701@comcast.net; Bellamy286@outlook.com; rbenson@shore-lawyers.com; mdunn@greatersalisbury.org; pdgosnell@yahoo.com; quanticojones@comcast.net; samorris655@gmail.com; david@davidplots.com; mchesnik@gmail.com; btsar7@comcast.net; rwstraus@hotmail.com; mwt@tilghman.org; phil.tilghman@tilghmanoil.com; blairtodd64@gmail.com; swhit12@live.com  
**Cc:** CountyCouncil; Laura Hurley  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Minimum ("floor") salary of the County Executive and other elected County officials  
**Attachments:** County Exec. Salary Discussion.pdf

[Sent from an email account outside of the Wicomico County network. Use caution when clicking on links or opening attachments.]

Folks,

This commentary is being sent by email because the comment portal on the County's website cannot handle tabular data easily, if at all. If you cannot open the attached file, upon request I will send the commentary as email text.

If you want to discuss the commentary or any aspect of the Charter (or the County government) feel free to contact me (no house calls, please).

The attached commentary focuses mostly upon the salary of the County Executive and the appallingly poor methodology of the 2017 Compensation and Allowance Commission in that regard. However, its bias against the Council members is equally appalling. Here is a comparison of the "average salary" methodology that is used for the County Executive, but not for the Council; the supporting data is from the MACO survey tables attached to the Commission's report dated October 31, 2017.

	<u>Average*</u>	<u>Proposed</u>	<u>Increase</u>
Executive	\$127,807	\$130,000	\$45,000 (53%)
Council (base)	\$52,879	\$17,000	\$1,000 (6%)

\* Applying the adjustment made by the Commission – reduction of 3.9% -- in the actual average salary of the Executive position.

The bias is further reflected in the ratio of the salary for these positions – using the average data, the Council (base) salary is about 41% of the Executive level. Under the levels proposed by the 2017 Commission, the Council salary would be about 13% of the Executive level, which is even lower than the current ratio (19%). If the ratio in the average salary data is applied to set the base salary for the Council, it should be about \$35,000 at present, and if the Executive's salary were \$120,000, then the Council base salary should be about \$49,000; if the Executive's salary were raised to \$130,000, then at the 41% level, the Council base salary should be about \$53,000.

The bias of the 2017 Commission is also reflected its recommendation for annual cost of living adjustment of the salary of the County Executive (and the Sheriff, too) but not the Council. And the Commission also made a recommendation regarding the Sheriff's salary that was based on the average in other counties. The Council is the only position for which the "average" methodology was not used.

The commentary is being furnished to Ms. Hurley to post on the website as may be desired, and to the Council members for their information and distribution to the next Compensation and Allowance Commission.



June 1, 2021

TO: Wicomico County's 2021 Charter Review Committee

FM: Robert B. Taylor

RE: Minimum ("floor") salary of the County Executive and other elected County officials

---

The Committee's decision on May 22 to recommend that the minimum salary of the County Executive should be increased by 41% to \$120,000 exemplifies the slapdash manner in which this Committee often operates. No meaningful basis was presented for that much higher floor amount – the most recent recommendation by the Compensation and Allowance Commission, which was posited as meaningful, is anything but that, as discussed in detail below -- and the notion expressed by at least one member that the current \$85,000 floor is grossly deficient is patent nonsense when put into realistic perspective. The motion that was made to table the matter for meaningful analysis was appropriate, and that should have occurred. The following data and discussion will provide pertinent information for that purpose.

As I mentioned, when the Executive's actual salary in other counties is placed in proper perspective, the current salary floor and actual salary is not unduly low. Here are actual salary and other data from other counties that are more typical than those in the much wealthier "metro core" counties.

	<u>Cecil</u>	<u>Frederick</u>	<u>Wicomico</u>
Executive's Salary (2021)	\$98,000	\$95,000	\$85,000
Population (2021-est.)	103,277	268,755	104,739
Per capita income (2019)	\$35,416	\$45,204	\$28,917
Income Tax Rate (FY20)	3.0%	2.96%	3.2%
Income Tax Rev. (FY20)	\$63.3 Million -- about \$600 per cap. rank in MD – 16	\$227.1 Million -- about \$850 per cap. rank in MD – 10	\$54.8 Million -- about \$525 per cap. rank in MD - 19

Thus, in both Cecil and Wicomico the Executive's salary is about 3 times the per capita income, whereas in Frederick County, which has a much greater per capita income, the Executive's salary is only about twice the per capita income. Although Cecil County has about the same population as Wicomico, there is a wealth gap, which is reflected in the higher salary there and put into further perspective by this FY20 data issued by the State of Maryland:

	<u>Cecil</u>	<u>Frederick</u>	<u>Wicomico</u>
General Fund Revenue	\$202.0 Million	\$612.0 Million	145.1 Million
Total Local Tax Revenue	\$193.0 Million	\$603.5 Million	124.6 Million
Property Tax Rate	1.0414%	1.0600%	0.9346%
Property Tax Revenue	\$121.7 Million -- about \$1,200 per cap. rank in MD – 16	\$335.2 Million -- about \$1,250 per cap. rank in MD – 12	\$66.7 Million -- about \$650 per cap. rank in MD – 23
Recordation Tax Revenue	\$5.4 Million	\$38.8 Million	\$3.8 Million

A Committee member was surprised that certain county employees are paid more than the Executive, but this is typical, viz:

	<u>Cecil</u>	<u>Frederick</u>	<u>Wicomico</u>
County Executive	98,000	95,000	85,000
Director of Administration	139,058	201,340	120,000
Finance Director	?	180,296	104,200
Human Resources Director	99,072	138,141	81,900
Info. Technology Director	110,038	142,017	96,390
Parks & Recreation Director	99,072	137,418	97,554
Planning & Zoning Director	121,006	170,096	97,528
Public Works Director	123,736	160,217	100,284

Perhaps the most important comparison is between the County Executive’s salary and that of the Director of Administration, which in these counties is:

- Cecil – 70%
- Frederick – 47%
- Wicomico – 71%

Although the data discussed above will surely change as a result of the salary review process, it is apparent that the actual salary and the floor amount stated in the Charter is not grossly (if at all) deficient when put into meaningful perspective, which the last compensation and allowance commission flatly failed to do.

The salary level in the “metro” counties – several of which are among the wealthiest in the United States – should not be considered. To exemplify, here is the actual salary of the County Executive and Council (base salary) and the ratio between them in the following:

	<u>Executive</u>	<u>Council</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Baltimore	\$175,000	\$62,500	36%
Howard	\$195,800	\$66,172	34%
Montgomery	\$192,769	\$128,519	67%
Prince George’s	\$215,998	\$128,062	59%

By contrast, the base Council salary in Wicomico County (\$16,000) is just 19% of that of the County Executive – the lowest in any county. Thus, if this Committee recommends any floor salary increase for the Executive, it should also recommend amending the Charter to state a reasonable salary floor for the Council. Indeed, that would be appropriate even if the Committee reconsiders and decides not to recommend any change regarding the Executive’s salary. Can you remember the last time the Council salary was increased?

The 2017 Compensation and Allowance Commission’s Recommendations

The Commission’s report, fittingly dated October 31, 2017, would be lucky to get a passing grade in most business schools. The recommendation for a huge (53%) increase in the County Executive’s salary – to \$130,000, plus annual COL adjustment – is based upon the average of the Executive’s salary in the other counties, including the “big 4” mentioned above, and increase in the CPI of about 33% (at that time) from 2006.

By contrast, the Commission recommended only a meager (\$1,000) increase, to \$17,000 (i.e., 6%) in the base Council salary and slightly more (11%), to \$20,000 for the president without comparison to the council salaries

elsewhere and making a bogus CPI analysis. If either of those metrics were applied in the same manner as for the Executive’s salary, the resulting Council salary, which was set in 1994, I believe, would be at least doubled.

In its report the Commission did not mention, much less consider, the wealth of the “charter” counties with an executive. Wicomico County is the least wealthy of those and almost the least wealthy County in Maryland. For perspective here are income data (median) –

	<u>Per capita</u>	<u>Household</u>
United States	\$35,627	\$65,712
Maryland	43,325	86,738
Wicomico County	28,917	54,402
Baltimore County	41,370	77,358
Prince George’s County	37,618	86,290
Montgomery County	54,812	110,389
Howard County	56,192	121,618

Howard County reached a new all-time high in per capita income in 2016 and again in 2019 and on that basis is one of the top 10 in the United States. Both Howard and Montgomery are in the top 1% of all the counties (as are some non-charter Maryland Counties as well).

Another factor not mentioned in the report: the relative size and scope of the Executive’s job. In the “metro” counties, as well as others, the Executive Branch includes a County police force and/or water and sewer facilities and operations, which are not present in the Wicomico County government. Both because of those departments as well as the much greater population and the number of County employees in every other county with an executive (except, possibly, Cecil County) the job requires much greater time and effort. For example, Baltimore County’s current (FY2021) budget provides for over 8,000 authorized positions, including about 2,600 (with about 1,800 sworn) personnel in the police force, 1,000 or more in both the Fire Department and Public Works Department, and almost 500 in the Department of Corrections.

Howard County’s FY 20 budget provides for 3255 employees with 697 police (sworn & civilian) personnel, 530 fire and rescue personnel, and 495 in the Public Works Department. These data in Baltimore and Howard County’s do not include employees in the public school system or community colleges. The Montgomery County and Prince Georges County budgets, as posted online, or hard to fathom, but it appears that in its FY 20 budget Montgomery County provides for almost 1900 Police Department personnel, with the police budget of nearly 300 million – about twice as much as Wicomico County’s entire budget – and over 1300 fire and rescue personnel, with a budget of \$244.5 million. These amounts may have been marginally lower in 2017.

I do not have an exact employment figure for Wicomico County, but understand that it’s less than 1,000 and that the Sheriff’s office (which does not operate the detention center) has about 140 personnel. There is no county police force or water and sewer systems or paid fire fighters. To compare Wicomico County to the metro counties is “apples to oranges,” to say the least.

Yet another difference: in Baltimore and Howard counties there are no incorporated municipalities – Towson, Ellicott City, Columbia, etc. are not incorporated – so the County is the only local government, whereas Salisbury, Fruitland, Delmar, etc., have police forces and operate water and sewer systems, and have fire departments. Broadly speaking, the County operates in the non-incorporated areas having a bit more than 50% of the population of the County (about 60,000), whereas in Baltimore County its more than 800,000 and in Howard County (the fastest growing county in Maryland) over 300,000. Again, apples to oranges.

It is astounding that the Commission, which was chaired by a professorial economist, did not bother to consider such significant data and simply did an average salary comparison based significantly on that the salary in the much wealthier and larger metro core counties and CPI data. The difference in the salary increases recommended for the Executive (53%) and for the base Council salary (6%) also suggests a marked bias in favor of the Executive among at least some Commission's members.

In essence, the Commission's recommendations are not worth the paper that they are written on.

#### Fallacy of a Large Executive's Salary

Increasing the Executive's salary would have only a very speculative and surely minimal effect on improving the quality of the County Executive because:

1. It would have no attraction for anyone living elsewhere, due to the residency requirement. Thus, the potential candidate pool remains the same.
2. Few, if any, competent and successful business or professional persons would leave their position for an elective office requiring "full-time" service and election every four years. The best person could be defeated in any election by a professional political hack (déjà vu all over again) -- we have now had ample opportunity to see how that requirement narrows the field, and what comes in on the tide.

These factors do not apply to unelected officials, who can and do move from different local and/or state government without (mostly) residential requirements that are difficult to meet. We have seen such movement here – including the Finance Director that Culver hired away from Northampton County (Leslie Lewis) and then fired, the Public Works Director, the Assistant Director of Administration, etc. Ordinary logic ("common sense") is to use salary increases to attract competent management personnel, not to lure additional candidates for the County Executive position.

#### Comment

To reiterate: in order to improve the field for County executive – and thereby improve the quality – scrap the full-time requirement and do not increase the salary much, if at all. Better yet, scrap the elected executive system now that we have seen what it causes.

If any elected county official is "grossly" underpaid, it is each Council member. If the Committee recommends any increase in the Executive's salary, then it should also recommend that the charter be amended to provide a reasonable minimum salary for each Council member.

In its report, the 2017 Compensation and Allowance Commission also recommended a salary increase for the Sheriff of 9.6% from \$95,000 to \$104,101. Again, this was based on CPI data and comparison to the salary in other counties, with no consideration of differences in wealth or that in some counties the Sheriff administers a much larger number of personnel, including in some the county jail (unlike here). Here's perspective from counties of similar population levels –

Cecil County. In addition to basic law enforcement (patrols, etc.) the Sheriff manages about 240 personnel, including those at the detention center and a separate minimum-security facility. As of 2020, the Sheriff's salary was \$121,000 (about \$505 per employee managed). For perspective, the County Council member's salary is \$27,000 – i.e., the Sheriff makes about 3.7 times the salary of a Cecil Council member.

Calvert County (population about 95,000). The Sheriff manages the County's detention center as well as law enforcement services, court security and process serving, with, overall, about 270 personnel. The sheriff's salary is \$150,019 (about \$555 per personnel managed). The salary of the county commissioners is \$48,000 – i.e., the Sheriff's salary is about 3.1 times the salary of a Commissioner.

Note: Calvert County is one of the wealthiest (per capita) in Maryland – it is 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in property tax revenue (3 times the amount in Wicomico County) and 6<sup>th</sup> highest in income tax revenue (2 times the amount in Wicomico County)

Washington County (population about 150,000). The Sheriff manages 273 employees and runs the jail, which has about 300 inmates on average. The Sheriff's office also does civil process (summons/evictions), court security and patrol operations. The County's salary review commission recommended, and the county commissioners recently decided to increase the Sheriff's salary, beginning in 2022, to \$126,630 (about \$460 per employee managed). The current salary of a County Commissioner is \$38,000 – i.e., the Sheriff will make about 3.2 times the salary (current level) of a County Commissioner.

By contrast, the Wicomico County Sheriff manages about 140 personnel, which at the current salary (\$95,000) equates to about \$680 per person managed and 6 times the base Council member's salary. Any recommendation regarding the Sheriff's salary should be done properly and competently, not just slapdash as occurred in 2017 without considering the relative scope of the position and wealth of the County.

---

Source Note: Income data is for 2019, from the most recent Census ACS report. County salary and revenue data is from compilations by the Maryland Association of Counties and/or the State of Maryland.