

## **Open Work Session**

**August 17, 2021**

### **One-Time Sign-On Bonus for Eligible Workers**

Ms. Pam Oland, Director of Finance, and Ms. Jaci Curry, Director of Human Resources, came before Council. Ms. Oland said this is an add-on for the three departments (Department of Corrections, Emergency Services and Sheriff's Office-Communication Specialist) that was talked about previously to try to get people in the door and stay in the door. She said it is a signing bonus, but it is not a day one signing bonus, as they need them to actually come and stay for a little while and be productive members of the employee community. She said this is actual funding that the County would pay out, not through the American Rescue Plan, and they are introducing this for this fiscal year, but there could be small payments that carry over into the next fiscal year. She said, if council is not interested in extending the program, then they would only carry over into FY23 the amount that would be budgeted for those who would have been hired but were still running out their training process. She said, due to vacancies that were mentioned in a prior work session, they feel there is sufficient funding in the department itself, so they are not asking for a budget amendment, they are just asking for the approval to be able to offer the concept. She clarified, there would be no additional financial impact, there would just be the availability of doing the signing bonus.

Mr. Holloway asked if the signing bonus will be handed out when they are first hired or after they have been there for a certain amount of time, to which Ms. Curry responded, they would need to successfully complete their first six months of employment, and that would involve no disciplinary action during that time. She said it would be paid out after that period if they successfully complete their training. Mr. Dodd said it looks bad when an employee gets a disciplinary action within the first six months.

Mr. Davis asked why this does not include other departments, like the Roads Division, to which Ms. Oland responded, at this point in time they are looking at departments where they are down the most people and struggling to fill the positions. Mr. Davis then asked how many people they are down at the Roads Division, to which Ms. Curry responded, she thinks there are eight positions open. Mr. Davis said that is not the number he was given, he was told it was much higher. Mr. Holloway said the Roads Division is not high on the list for responsibilities.

Mr. Dodd asked if the eligible employees would be from Emergency Services and the Department of Corrections, to which Ms. Oland responded, yes, and they would include the third group, the Sheriff's Office Communication Specialist. She clarified, they inadvertently left them off the request, but it was not intentional, it was intended for the two groups to be the same, so when Legislation comes forward, it will actually include that third group as well.

Mrs. Hurley asked if law enforcement is included, to which Ms. Oland, responded, no, not law enforcement, it would just be the Communication Specialists. She clarified, the same employees who are eligible for the premium pay would be eligible for this signing bonus. Mr. Dodd asked if she means the Communications Specialists at the Sheriff's Office, to which Ms. Oland responded, correct, but not the deputies.

Mr. Cannon said he is fully aware of the competition the County has with the Corrections Department because there are other agencies battling for those same individuals and successfully hiring, but he is not as familiar with Emergency Services, so he wants to have a better idea of what they are up against before making a decision. Ms. Oland responded, Emergency Services, from her understanding, is a high

stress, high training job. She said, as Ms. Curry stated, some positions are currently filled but are not considered trained, so they cannot work a shift by themselves, they literally have to still sit there with a trainer. She said the length of time it takes to be a fully trained 9-1-1 operator and Communication Specialist at the Sheriff's Department is lengthy, so they are trying to compete against other areas that are hiring and also trying to give an incentive to come work for the County.

Mr. Dodd said he has done some research and he thinks they have lost some Communications Specialists to Sussex County, Somerset County, and he thinks Dorchester County, so this is an issue.

Mr. Cannon asked if the signing bonus resolves the issue, or does an increase in the pay scale resolve it, to which Ms. Curry responded, they would look at the pay scale in the salary study as well.

Ms. Oland said this is a way to bridge the gap until the salary survey comes into place, and this is the same argument they used for the American Rescue Plan funding, but the difference is that this is coming from money they already have in hand due to vacancies.

Mr. Holloway said they keep talking about the salary study. He then asked how many employees the County has, to which Ms. Curry responded, just under 600. Mr. Holloway said there is no doubt that when that study comes in it is going to show that they are going to have to increase salaries across the board. He said it is going to be a budget item of an enormous magnitude that they are not expecting. He then asked, how do they plan on solving that problem, to which Ms. Oland responded, the salary study will show what the magnitude of the problem is, but, at this point in time, she does not know. She said, as the Finance Director, she does not feel it is appropriate to start picking and choosing departments to give raises to, and that is why they are offering these two ways to help departments in the short term. She said, once they know the magnitude, it will be her responsibility to come to Council with a potential solution as to how to solve this problem and bridge the gap.

Mr. Dodd asked how much the salary study cost the County, to which Ms. Curry responded, she thinks, \$60,000. Mr. Dodd asked if they have looked at the Maryland Association of Counties website to look at the annual study they have for every employee in every County, to which Ms. Curry responded, that is something the team will be taking into consideration. Mr. Dodd said the County is paying \$60,000 to do a study that it could be doing, to which Ms. Oland responded, it is not as simple as just trying to compare a title. She said the County has paid for studies in the past that have picked titles, and this is not picking and choosing titles, this is every title across the County. She said the other advantage to having it contracted out is they cannot say they influenced it, they have brought an outside objective party that is not the Finance Department, not Human Resources, not the Executive's Office, it is an outside company trained in doing this study that will give objective information so it cannot be said they are picking and choosing. Mr. Dodd said he hopes the study will identify issues they cannot see, but they can look at what Dorchester or Caroline County are paying their employees by pulling up that study, so he hopes they can identify something they may miss and he hopes they are fair to all employees.

Mr. McCain asked if they are providing any information in terms of the number of positions they may have in different departments and the hierarchy within those departments because, for long-term sustainability, they want to look at the number of vacancies and look at the competition from other government entities. He said, frankly, they need to look at a different model because, going back 15, 20, or 25 years ago, that model has not changed much over time. He said there may be a different way to do business, such as combining departments, and there are just a whole host of things to make it a more efficient model. Ms. Oland responded, they are looking at positions, but she does not think they are

evaluating whether or not those are the right positions. Mr. McCain said that was kind of where he was heading to some degree. Ms. Oland said, once they know the magnitude of the problem, Administration will then look at the most efficient way for the County to provide the services they need. She said they have to look at everything the County offers an employer across the board as they all play a role in what is considered their salary and benefits package, and they have to take a look at what the most attractive combination of that is for their current employees and any future employees.

Mr. Cannon said, getting back to the signing bonus, he is in favor of it as he thinks the fiscal impact has to be very minimal. He said he applauds them for entertaining this idea and bringing it before Council and letting them know, and he is fully in favor of it.

There was a consensus to move this request forward as a Resolution at the Council meeting of September 7.

There was no further discussion.



Larry W. Dodd, President, District 3



Joe Holloway, Vice President, District 5



John T. Cannon, At-Large



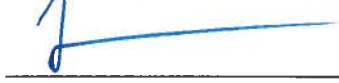
William R. McCain, At-Large



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Nicole Acle, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator