

Citizen panel recommends Washington lawmakers get 14% pay hike to \$71K by 2026



A panel composed of Washington residents has recommended a pay raise for state legislators.
FILE PHOTO

by [STAFF REPORT](#)

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(The Center Square) – The Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials has recommended state lawmakers be given a 14% pay boost over the next two years.

Commission members heard from several legislators during two days of hearings last week before finalizing recommendations that would also increase pay for statewide executive offices and judges.

Legislators currently earn \$61,997 for what is considered a part-time job.

Under the proposed increase, that salary would climb to \$66,411 in July 2025 and rise to \$71,126 in July 2026.

Lt. Governor Denny Heck told commission members that current pay has fallen far behind the time commitment involved.

“The members of the Legislature are our board of directors for our 8 million citizens,” said Heck. “They pass operating budgets in excess of \$70 billion dollars and that doesn’t include the transportation budget or the capital budget.”

Heck suggested dysfunction at the federal level in Congress has increased the importance of the role on state lawmakers.

“State legislative pay is not commensurate with the magnitude of their responsibilities,” he observed.

Sen. Spencer Hutchins, R-Gig Harbor, told the commission the main reason he’s not seeking reelection after just two years in the Legislature is pay.

“It simply was not feasible for my family for me to seek reelection, financially and practically,” said Hutchins, who noted that doing the best job for his constituents would mean making the commitment full-time and year-round.

“The part-time nature of the Legislature is at best a misnomer,” he said.

Sen. Annette Cleveland, D-Vancouver, said the job has taken a toll on her over the years due to the divisive nature of politics.

“The job of a legislator has become increasingly difficult,” said Cleveland, who has held her seat for more than a dozen years.

Commission members also heard from Rep. Skyler Rude, R-Benton County, who explained he was initially committed to being a legislator full time.

“When I first got this role, I committed to not having a second job so I could focus on being the best legislator I could,” Rude said.

He, too, learned it that didn't pan out in the real world.

“This job could easily be eight hours a day, 40 hours a week,” Rude noted.

Under the proposal, statewide executives like the governor and attorney general would get a 3% pay bump for cost of living in July of next year and 2% more in July 2026.

State Supreme Court justices and district court judges would get a 4% increase next July and 3% the year after.

Supreme Court justices currently earn \$251,861. Under the proposal, that would increase to \$262,011 July 2025 and rise to \$269,924 in July 2026.

Legislator salaries vary dramatically from state to state.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, lawmakers in Washington, D.C., make the most, with a salary of \$161,000, with New York legislators earning the second highest salary at \$142,000.

New Hampshire lawmakers earn \$100 dollars each day during session and legislators in New Mexico are paid nothing for their service.

The proposed salary schedule will be open for public comment until Feb 5. Once the commission approves the salary schedule, lawmakers and state office holders can not make any changes.

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