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State to even out women's pay

Female-dominated DHHR positions to get salary increase

BY JANET L. METZNER *The Dominion Post*

State Department of Health and Human Resources employees in 11 female-dominated jobs will get a pay raise next month.

The Legislature's Equal Pay Commission will dole out \$635,616 in raises to about 1,300 employees effective Nov. 1, to help raise their salaries closer to the average of male-dominated jobs' salaries, said Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia.

The raise may not seem like much — from \$36 to \$50 per month, but it's a start, said Fleischauer, who is commission chairman representing the House of Delegates.

"I think it's really exciting. I think they are really deserving," she said.

Eleven job categories will receive the raises, including protective service worker trainees, social service coordinators, protective service workers, Child Protective Services support staff, economic service workers, among other social service workers.

To fund the raises, \$250,000 in state general revenue funds were set aside. The remaining amount is provided by federal matching funds. This is not the first group to get raises due to Equal Pay Commission's efforts. During the past two years, the commission has given out \$1.6 million in pay raises. Nurses were one group that has already received raises.

The commission began in 2000 as an act of Legislature, Fleischauer said. All totaled, \$700,000 in state funds have been spent on the raises.

Commission members used a personnel management tool called the "Hay factor" to determine the "value" of jobs, Fleischauer said.

Points were given for skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions. The points allowed the commission to compare "apples and oranges," referring to male-dominated and female-dominated jobs that should have similar salaries, but may appear to be quite different in other ways, she said.

Salaries were plotted, and the average salary for male-dominated positions were determined. "There aren't many female-dominated jobs above that line," Fleischauer said, referring to the average salary on a graph.

"Our ultimate goal is to get jobs with 80 percent women closer to that line," she said.

John Law, DHHR spokesman, said the raises help retain valuable employees.

"How can we not afford to at least bring women and other folks up to the median salary levels?" he said. "State workers are generally underpaid and they do a lot of good work. If we do not do that, we are going to lose these folks. We certainly want to do everything we can to retain them."

DHHR employs 5,200 people. Law estimates about half are women.

It is becoming especially important to retain employees now that the age of state employees is rising, with "a great number" expected to retire in 10 to 15 years, Law said.

"We are happy that our employees get extra money even if it's a small amount each month. We recognize the good work they do."

Sen. Randy White, D-Webster, commission chairman representing the Senate, said there is more work to do. "We still have a long way to go, but this is a significant improvement in rectifying a past inequity. And while we certainly haven't been able to provide everyone with an increase, I'm glad we were able to address those with the greatest disparity."