

# It Pays to be a Public Servant



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This is one of those articles that I've had in draft form for about 6 months, but a recent battle between New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell and the City Council regarding the City Council's proposed 44% pay raise sparked my interest in finishing it. Much of the data provided below is over a year old, but I hope it is good enough to get my points across.

New Bedford can be a tough place to earn a living. If you are looking for a job in Massachusetts, New Bedford is not the place to start your search even for New Bedford residents.

The facts are that you are twice as likely to be out of work in New Bedford or earn half the income as everyone else in Massachusetts.



New Bedford consistently has double the state unemployment rate and half the state per capita income

average.

Since 2010, New Bedford's unemployment rate has fluctuated between 10-17% (currently at 11.3%) while the state of Massachusetts' unemployment rate currently sits at 6%. Even those that are working in New Bedford earn considerably less money than everyone else in the state. The per capita income in Massachusetts is \$33,460 compared to just \$15,602 to \$20,168 in New Bedford. However, the numbers change dramatically if you are one of the top wage earners working for the city of New Bedford. Per 2010 data, 52 city employees earn over \$100,000 a year and over 103 of them earn over \$90,000 a year or roughly six times more than the average worker in New Bedford. The data is over a year old, but you can check the 2010 city pay database yourself [here](#).

In 2010, 55 city employees earned more than the Mayor who earned a salary of \$98,735.79. The vast majority of these high paying salaries go to the police and fire departments, all critical jobs for the city. These are dangerous jobs and earning six times the average wage can be justified once you compute risk, overtime, skill needed and education. The big question for me is, should they get pay raises in an environment with high unemployment and low pay city wide? This is a fair question when considering the New Bedford City Council hasn't had a pay raise since 1997 and work is tough to come by in our city.

### **It Pays Double to Be a State Legislator**



## The Massachusetts State House

The New Bedford City Council recently voted to increase their salary from \$14,612 to \$21,000. To be fair, let's compare the New Bedford City Council pay to that of State Legislators and New Bedford City workers.

In October of 2011, The Commonwealth Magazine produced an article titled, "The \$100,000 Club." This caught my eye:

*"The base salary for a state legislator is \$61,133 a year, slightly less than the median household income in Massachusetts of \$64,057. (The per capita income in Massachusetts is \$33,460, according to the 2010 Census.) Lawmakers receive an additional \$7,200 for expenses ..."*

The question I have to ask is, if you are getting paid \$69,000+ to be a legislator, shouldn't you put all of your working hours into becoming a legislator? If people in New Bedford are earning \$15,602 a year working 40 hours a week, shouldn't our legislators be putting all their time into their job when they are earning four times that amount of a New Bedford worker, or twice as much of a Massachusetts worker? We have 23 Massachusetts lawmakers earning more than \$100,000 in outside income and many others earn close to that. That means that 23 of them are making at least \$161,000 a year of combined income and likely devoting most of their time to their outside jobs. Is there any wonder our legislators don't read or know what is in the bills that they vote on? Or why they need huge amounts of staff paid for by the tax payer? Maybe they wouldn't need a large staff if they devoted more time towards their public service job.

### **A Review of the New Bedford 2013 Budget**

On a recent Friday night I decided to skip a night out and spend two hours skimming the 2013 New Bedford budget. Yes, I'm

geeky like that. If you have insomnia, you can check out the FY13 budget here. Here are some items that immediately jumped out at me. In a terrible, low paying economy ...

- The Mayor's Office budget went from \$284,000 in FY11, to \$330,000 in FY 12, to a whopping \$602,000 for FY 13. Why nearly a 100% increase in a single year?
- The Mayor added a \$120,000 a year Chief Financial Officer to his office. Is this needed when New Bedford has a Treasury Department that costs over \$500,000 a year?
- In the budget, there is an Administrative Assistant in the Assessor's Office (page 7 of the budget) that makes \$90,000 a year, more than the City Clerk (\$70k/yr), the Director of Communications (\$73k/yr), the Director of EMS (\$70k/yr), Director of Public Health (\$69k/yr), the Library Director (\$79k/yr), and even the Mayor's Chief of Staff (\$85k/yr). There is a separate longevity pay, so it's not because he/she has been there for a long time. Should an Administrative Assistant be making four times the average New Bedford salary? More than most directors? Almost as much as the Mayor?
- In the budget there is funding for a Director of EMS (\$70k/yr) and a Acting Director of EMS (\$63k/yr). Why two large salaries for the same job?
- There is a Director of Leash Law that makes \$66k a year. Really?
- We have two Parking Meter Repair Men positions making \$36k a year. Do our meters break so much that we need two?

### **In Closing ...**

I'm certain that New Bedford and Massachusetts are just like most cities and states in America. I also understand that many high paying jobs are based on experience, education and hazardous duties. I have more of an issue with our state legislators getting rich from public service and not giving

their full attention towards their jobs than I do with a police man or woman earning \$90,000 a year in New Bedford. The City Council got a 44% pay raise shot down by the mayor's office that increased their budget by nearly 100% in a single year (page 71). As New Bedford residents we should pay less attention to the newspaper headlines and spend more time reading the fine print in our City Budgets. You'll discover that pay raises and huge budgets increase more rampart than thought and it can pay very well to be a public servant.