



D.C.-region bureaucrats rake in big bucks

By: Ben Giles - October 17, 2012

More than 4,500 local government employees in the Washington region, or roughly one of every 12 workers, make \$100,000 or more in base salary alone.

Of roughly 56,262 government workers in the District, Alexandria and Arlington, Fairfax, Montgomery and Prince George's counties, 4,555 employees, or 8.1 percent, earn high individual incomes, which don't include benefits and overtime pay that typically exceed those provided in the private sector, government spending experts said. The list does not include public school employees.

Jurisdiction	Employees earning \$100,000-plus	Total employees	Percent
Alexandria	204	2,661	7.7
Arlington	289	3,500	8.3
District	1,943	22,094	8.8
Fairfax	912	12,302	7.4
Montgomery	722	8,845	8.2
Prince George's	485	6,860	7.1

Total	4,555	56,262	8.1
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Sources: Alexandria Human Resources Department, as of July; Arlington Department of Human Resources, as of October; D.C. city website, as of March 2011, data stripped of D.C. Public Schools employees; Fairfax County government, as of October, and excludes salaries of judges and the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority; Montgomery Office of Human Resources, includes fiscal 2013 salary information; Prince George's County Office of Human Resources Management, as of calendar 2012.

-Jennifer Peebles and Ben Giles

D.C. leads all jurisdictions, with 1,943 of its 22,094 workers -- or 8.8 percent -- earning at least \$100,000 a year, according to an analysis of recent salary data.

The city also lays claim to the highest-paid local government employee in the region: City Administrator Allen Lew, who brings in \$295,000 a year in base salary.

While the jurisdictions' leaders rank at the top of the lists, those earning a high wage also include lesser-known workers, such as a marketing chief in D.C. paid more than \$114,000 and a labor relations adviser in Montgomery County paid more than \$103,000.

The high wages for government employees easily eclipse the area's median income.

The average median individual income of all six jurisdictions is \$66,470 a year, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Those range from a low of \$50,621 in Prince George's to \$84,360 in Arlington.

"That's certainly going to rub people the wrong way, especially in a weak economy," said Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst at the Cato Institute. "Even if you've kept your job, you probably haven't seen much in the way of pay increases, and while there have been cutbacks and layoffs at the county level, that's following years of pay increases."

The high wages are a sign that the federal government-centric region places a premium on local government work, as well, said John Challenger, CEO at Chicago outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.

"It does make sense that the D.C. metropolitan area would value government work more than other areas of the country, because so many people have worked at one level of government, or know friends or family who have worked for the government at one point," he said.

In Virginia jurisdictions, Fairfax County Executive Edward Long Jr. led the way with a salary of \$271,167.33 -- a rate that included a car allowance, according to Fairfax County government data.

Prince George's County Executive Rushern Baker is the fourth-highest-paid employee in his county. His \$180,473 salary ranks behind the top earner, Chief Administrative Officer Bradford Seamon, who earns \$193,000.

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett earns \$175,000 annually, the 20th-highest-paid Montgomery government employee. Chief Administrative Officer Timothy Firestine earns the most at \$266,266.

And such high wages don't account for other compensation.

"It's the benefits that are excessive compared to what private-sector employees are getting," DeHaven said.

Government officials defend what critics call excessive compensation, saying they must spend to employ quality employees and compete with each other as well as the federal government.

"To get the best and brightest managers, you have to pay," said Fairfax County Supervisor Pat Herrity, R-Springfield. "My issues are more with many of the 'political statement' positions and the overall size of the county work force."

Many jurisdictions have frozen their employees' salaries for the last several years as the recession reduced local tax revenue. Some have started handing out bonuses equal to a 3 percent raise to compensate, but those have no long-term effect on pensions.