



Compensation Review Commission

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COMMISSION MEMBERS

Ellen Flynn Giles, Chair
Scott Houghton, Vice Chair
Maura Dunnigan
Rashida George
Ginnie Gick
Kia Payne
Pravin Ponnuri

Report of the 2025 Compensation Review Commission

December 17, 2025

I. AUTHORITY OF COMMISSION

In the year preceding the election for the next Howard County Executive and the next five members of the Howard County Council, the Howard County Charter requires that a Compensation Review Commission be established to recommend the salaries and allowances for these elected offices.

Section 10-302 of the Local Government of the Maryland Code authorizes Maryland charter counties to establish a commission to set compensation and allowances to be paid to members of each County's County Council, and Section 10-303 of the Local Government Article authorizes each County to set the compensation of the County Executive. The Howard County Charter and Title 5, Subtitle 1 of the Howard County Code specifies that seven members of the public will be appointed to conduct the necessary research and submit recommendations for the salaries and allowances for four year term of the next County Executive and County Council.

Accordingly, this Compensation Review Commission was established to make recommendations for the members of the County Council and the County Executive who will be elected in November 2026 and installed in their positions beginning in December 2026. The Resolutions appointing Commission members set December 21, 2025, as the deadline for recommendations and that the Commission is terminated on April 30, 2026.

The following Commission Members were appointed and confirmed:

- Ellen Flynn Giles (CR125-2025), Chair
- Scott Houghton (CR130-2025), Vice Chair
- Maura Dunnigan (CR174-2025)
- Rashida George (CR128-2025)
- Ginnie Gick (CR129-2025)
- Kia Payne (CR127-2025)
- Pravin Ponnuri (CR161-2025)

II. STUDY

The Commission's role and responsibility was to recommend fair and reasonable levels of compensation and allowances for the positions of County Council and County Executive. The Commission placed high value in the work and dedication of Howard County citizens who pursue these roles, and did not consider the performance or personality of the incumbents in the course of their work.

Extensive research was conducted into the way in which elected officials in Howard County are compensated. Salaries and benefits were compared to all other counties in the State and to the members of the Maryland General Assembly. Relevant economic data was also discussed in detail. The Commission reviewed projected trends in annual inflation, the local cost of living, and the annual income of average Howard County workers and households.

Input was requested from the County Executive and from all five current Council members to better learn the full range of duties and responsibilities of those offices and the incumbents' view on what they considered to be fair compensation. The Commission heard important testimony on the duties and responsibilities of elected officials, the hours and workload they are committed to, and the healthcare and retirement benefits that are made available to them during their term of service.

The Commission understands that County Council Members have a wide range of responsibilities as the County's legislative branch of government. Current Members reported working between 10 and 65 hours a week, with more time dedicated during budget adoption and other intense legislative schedules. Council Members, along with their staff, dedicate significant time to constituent services, legislative duties, community outreach, and many other important tasks.

The County Executive, which is designated as a full-time position by County law, is responsible for the day to day operation of the County government. While the County Executive was not able to weigh in themselves, the Commission heard other testimony about the workload of the County Executive, including managing County departments, communicating with the public, and participating in Statewide and national organizations.

Amanda Mihill, Esq. from the County Office of Law, briefed the Commission on the legal issues involved in recommending compensation for the Council Members and County Executive as well as the application of the Open Meetings and Public Information laws and answered the Commissioners' questions about the application of laws. The Commission also was assisted in their work by the Department of Finance, the Budget Office, the Office of Human Resources, and the staff of the County Council. These County offices and staff provided the Commission with important background information and administrative support.

In accordance with County law and in an interest in receiving full input from the public, the Commission held a public hearing on November 19th. Three members of the public came to share their views on compensation with the Commission.

The Commission adopted preliminary recommendations on November 5th, which proposed Council Members and the County Executive should receive annual salary increases equal to the annual salary increase offered to general County employees. Following the public hearing and a discussion with the Office of Law, the Commission concluded that the proposal would potentially violate the provision of the County Charter prohibiting the Council from approving mid-term salary changes.

III. ANALYSIS

It was important conclusions of the Commission's work that salary levels and allowances for citizens serving in elected offices must:

- Balance with the financial standing of the County over the next four years, especially taking into consideration long term budget and economic trends that may impact the County;
- Incentivize the recruitment of high quality candidates from all professional, economic, and personal backgrounds;
- Disincentivize the promotion of the elected positions as an opportunity for inequitable personal financial gain; and
- Consider comparisons to the annual compensation adjustments for other employees of the County.

The Commission agreed that the County Council and County Executive must continue to have ample access to technology to best serve their constituents. The Commission did not hear any testimony from incumbents that the current stipends for communications and technology services were insufficient, and therefore agreed to leave those stipends at their current levels.

The full budgetary cost of elected position was considered by the Commission, including County contributions to Council Member and County Executive health care plans and retirement plans. The Commission concluded that the elected officials receive high quality benefits as part of their compensation.

For County Executive, the Commission reached consensus that the salary level and allowances were already well positioned for the office. The role is defined by Charter as a full-time occupation and is compensated as such. The Commission agreed that the existing salary rate would only be adjusted for cost-of-living increases over the next four years.

The role and salary of County Council Member was thoroughly considered, and the Commission seriously discussed the issue of full-time status versus part-time status for County Council Members. The County Charter and County Code do not explicitly state the expected time a Council Member is expected to dedicate to their roles. The Charter does allow Council Members to hold other positions of employment. In contrast, the Charter does explicitly state that the County Executive "shall devote full time to the duties of his or her office."

It was noted in responses received from current Council Members that some chose to consider their office a full time position, dedicating between 40 and 65 hours a week to their

duties and not holding other employment. Other current Council Members indicated they committed to the role part-time, as is currently indicated in County law, and held other jobs during their time in office.

In reviewing the hours dedicated and the commitments undertaken, the Commission agreed that the position of County Council Member has evolved beyond part-time responsibility and has become a full-time office. While specific code changes on this question will not be included in legislation that adopts the Commission's recommended salaries, the Commission concluded that the County Council, County Executive, and future Charter Review Commissions should consider necessary changes to the County Charter and County Code to reflect the full-time responsibilities of a Member of the County Council.

The Commission's final recommendations include increases in the salaries of County Council Members to reflect the demands of the position and the cost-of-living in the county. Thoughtful adjustments to compensation were not simply a matter of pay. It is an investment in accessible, ethical, and high-quality local governance.

At present, the financial realities of serving on the County Council can create barriers for talented individuals who wish to pursue public service but cannot afford to sacrifice stable income to do so. This dynamic disproportionately affects residents from lower and middle socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as those who hold multiple jobs or serve as primary caregivers. When public service requires personal financial hardship, entire communities lose out on the diverse perspectives and lived experiences that strengthen democratic decision-making.

Increasing Council Member salaries would meaningfully lower these barriers and encourage a broader, more representative pool of candidates. Doing so supports racial, economic, generational, and occupational diversity, ensuring that the Council reflects the full makeup of the county it serves. Compensation that allows public servants to meet basic financial obligations without strain fosters a more equitable pathway into leadership and helps ensure that elected positions are not limited only to those with independent wealth or flexible professional circumstances.

Additionally, competitive and appropriate compensation helps attract and retain highly qualified candidates who can dedicate the time, expertise, and focus necessary for effective governance. Council Members shoulder complex responsibilities, from budget oversight to land-use decisions to constituent services. Ensuring their compensation is commensurate with these responsibilities allows them to perform their duties with the professionalism, preparation, and independence the public expects.

Finally, research and best-practice guidance consistently show that reasonable and transparent compensation structures can reduce susceptibility to outside influence. When elected officials are not forced to rely on secondary employment or private relationships to supplement income, it strengthens public trust and safeguards against conflicts of interest.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons analyzed above, the Commission unanimously recommends the following schedule of salaries and allowances for County elected officials.

For County Council Members:

- Salary, beginning after December 2026 installation:
 - 2027: **\$87,418.80**, a **5%** increase from 2026.
 - 2028: **\$91,789.74**, a **5%** increase from 2027.
 - 2029: **\$96,379.23**, a **5%** increase from 2028.
 - 2030: **\$101,198.19**, a **5%** increase from 2029.
- Other stipends and benefits:
 - **\$3,500** annual stipend for the Chair of the County Council.
 - **\$200** monthly stipend for monthly communication services.
 - **\$100** for each meeting of the Zoning Board that the member attends.
 - **\$1,500** 4 year stipend for technology costs.
 - **Continued** access to health and retirement benefits.

For County Executive:

- Salary, beginning after December 2026 installation:
 - 2027: **\$244,466.60**, a **2.5%** increase from 2026.
 - For 2028 through 2030, an annual percentage increase equal to the increase in the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers (CPI-U) in the Baltimore-Colombia-Towson MD region, with an annual cap of 2.5%.
- Other stipends and benefits:
 - **\$150** monthly stipend for monthly communication services.
 - **Continued** access to health and retirement benefits.

This report will be made available to the County Council, the County Executive, and the public. All records of the work conducted by this Commission will be publicly available on the County Council's webpage, including video recordings of all the Commission's meetings. Upon submission of this report, legislation will be introduced to adopt the recommended salaries and allowances for the County Executive and County Council Members who will be installed in December 2026. The Commission will be available to the County Council and County Executive should any questions arise during the legislative process. The Commission has no further meetings scheduled and will officially terminate on April 30, 2026.

Respectfully submitted on December 17, 2025.

Ellen Flynn Giles, Chair
Scott Houghton, Vice Chair
Maura Dunnigan
Rashida George

Ginnie Gick
Kia Payne
Pravin Ponnuri