

November 9, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

In recent months we've seen massive changes taking place in this State and Nation in response to an impossible array of population stressors. Citizens in every state now face clear and present dangers to their health, financial security, education, physical safety, access to food, and their franchise.

In measuring the impact and origin of all of these challenges and their intersectionality, the underlying role of discrimination has taken center stage across the country. Discrimination can be based on race, nationality, sex, gender expression, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, or zip code, to name just a few. It takes place in homes, media, workplaces, events and gatherings, and in public policy. Even in California, it takes place between professional technical disciplines and how they are compensated by the State. It has been the lived experience of members of California Bargaining Unit 10 – State Scientists, that a number of these forms of discrimination are taking place synergistically with respect to our treatment by the State for the last 15 years.

Unit 10 scientists have endured a severe pay inequity since 2005. It was unacceptable when it started, and now it has become even more egregious and injurious under today's circumstances. And this is now causing real mission delivery issues within CalEPA agencies and beyond, where environmental scientists and environmental engineers work side-by-side, conducting similar work – and where engineers earn up to 50% more than their peer scientists.

These scientists reside largely in agencies within CalEPA and the Resources Agency. Both Agency Secretaries have now submitted letters to the Director of CalHR expressing the same sentiments contained in this letter, including detailed costs and metrics. Further, CalHR has received similar letters from former Senator Barbara Boxer, District Attorneys, and environmental coalitions. Even representatives of industry have spoken up on this issue. The CA Department of Toxic Substances Control conducted series of statewide listening sessions in 2019, where industry representatives related State Scientist compensation to issues with timely permit and project delivery. This is not a partisan or controversial issue.

It must also be recognized that for female, Black, Native, Latinx, AAPI, LGBTQ+, and other scientists of diversity, a severe and long-standing pay inequity between state employee disciplines represents simply another form of institutional discrimination. There is no meaningful difference between the work conducted by California State Scientists and Engineers. This is a legally settled matter¹. This disparity was resolved for Managers, repeatedly, but a solution for

rank and file scientists yet eludes us – in clear violation of Government Code 19826, which states that “similar and comparable duties must be compensated similarly.”²

We are sensitive to these fiscally challenging times, and State Scientists are not asking for special treatment. But the State must also recognize that these challenges are not experienced equitably, nor proportionately. Scientists of color are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Many scientists live in high-cost areas and, without the geographic pay differential enjoyed by California Engineers and our Federal colleagues, face disproportionate financial hardships. Many of us now work longer hours to compensate for the 5% shift of the State workforce to COVID-19 contact tracing (affecting each State BDO). The high cost of living in California compounds crises related to student debt, rent, mortgage, food security, education, and childcare experienced by many scientists with advanced degrees – who are not afforded the same educational differentials enjoyed by other Units and our Federal colleagues. As we subsidize our agencies by continuing to work from our homes, which are now essentially State workplaces, we are called in this moment to be even more vocal.

All of these issues intersect and compound our suffering, yet we remain passionate about the crucial work we do to keep all Californians safe from toxic chemicals in their homes and environment, and to ensure they have clean air and water, and safe food. As scientists, we manage and conduct research related to viral outbreaks which is more vital now to health and safety than ever before, while we also work to maintain a richly diverse and productive natural environment. We serve California’s Tribal Nations and overburdened Environmental Justice communities with pride and dedication. And California State Scientists play a crucial role in all areas related to Global Climate Change and adaptation. If California is to really be known as an employer of choice to the full diversity of its citizenry, as well as to the nation and world – these matters must be resolved expeditiously.

Your own inaugural speech on January 7, 2019 included the words “everyone deserves fair pay”, and “it’s never the wrong time to do the right thing.” Your leadership in these times, in many ways, has been inspiring. But as you well know, there is always more work to do – more wrongs to right.

Governor Newsom, you have an opportunity here to:

commit to science,

commit to equity,

commit to fairness,

and adhere to the law.

In fiscal terms, the “fix” State Scientists seek is negligible to the 5th largest economy on the planet.

² https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=19826&lawCode=GOV

And to borrow a phrase from the Social Justice Movement – silence is complicity.

As your CalHR Bargaining Team continues to “plead poverty” throughout our ongoing collective bargaining process, we would appreciate a clear response from your Administration to this plea so that we can continue our important work for California – a State we yearn to assert is increasingly progressive and Leads by Example through enforcing fair and equitable compensation for all of its employees.

cc Sec. Blumenfeld - CalEPA
Sec. Crowfoot - CNRA
Dir. Ortega – CalHR
Dir. Bosler - DOF
Pres. Gordus – CAPS

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