Maryland’s ‘middle officers’ would see biggest salary bumps under proposal
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Salaries for Maryland’s constitutional offices could all increase under a proposal submitted by a state commission.

Under a proposal adopted Wednesday night by the Governor’s Salary Commission, the state’s next governor could see a raise, though it would be smaller than those of other offices.

“The governor we did differently,” said Bruce Plaxen, chair of the commission. “In terms of percentages, the governor got by far the smallest percentage raise over the four-year term, going to $15,000.”

Every four years, two commissions are tasked with examining the salaries of state officials.

One commission looks primarily at the governor. More recently, that panel has also made recommendations for other offices, including lieutenant governor and comptroller. The previous time the panel recommended raises was in 2013.

Another panel makes recommendations on salaries for the 188 delegates and senators.

The General Assembly may lower the amount of a proposed increase. The legislature cannot adopt a new salary that is lower than the current one, and lawmakers may not pass an increase larger than recommended.

Any increases recommended by either panel would not take effect until after the term begins in 2023.

The so-called “middle officers” — lieutenant governor, comptroller, attorney general and treasurer — would receive the largest increases if this proposal is passed next year.

Currently, the salaries for each of those four offices is $149,500. The panel recommended that those salaries increase to $175,000 — the same salary paid to Maryland Circuit Court judges and the House of Representatives.

“The fact of the matter is that those salaries have been frozen now for eight years,” said D. Bruce Poole, a commission member who also served in the General Assembly and chaired the Maryland Democratic Party. “State employees have continued to have bump ups. The work certainly isn’t getting any easier.”
Members of the commission noted that in many cases, deputies were earning more than their bosses. The proposed salary increase closes those gaps, though not completely.

The new salaries would be phased in beginning with a $15,500 bump in 2023. Increases of $5,000, 43,000 and $2,000 would take effect annually through 2026.

The next highest proposed increase, more than 13.7%, would go to the secretary of state, who is appointed by the governor.

The panel recommended that salary increase from the current $105,500 to $112,500 in 2023. Three additional increases would bring the final salary to $120,000 by the end of the term.

Maryland’s next governor could see a more modest increase of under 8.5%. The panel recommended that the salary increase from the current $180,000 to $195,000 by the end of the term.

The way that salary is phased in would be different from other proposed increases. The plan adopted by the commission Wednesday night calls for three annual increases of $4,000. A final $3,000 increase would come in 2026.

“It is not at all in derogation of the current governor’s service,” Poole said. “It’s just that the salary is already higher than what all of the other statewide officials make and it’s also in recognition of all the additional benefits that the governor gets.”

Some of those additional benefits include transportation and drivers, as well as housing. Another benefit given to governors is an automatic vesting in retiree health insurance. At age 62, a former governor is eligible for a state insurance subsidy based on the number of years in office. The maximum tops out at 50%.

Additionally, former governors’ pensions are indexed to the salary of the current governor. All three living former governors would receive a raise, should the new salary be approved.

Republican former Gov. Robert Ehrlich’s current pension for one term in office is $60,000, or one-third the current governor’s salary. By 2026, that payment would increase to $65,000.

Two-term former governors earn 50% of the current salary as a pension. Annual pension payments to Democratic former Govs. Parris Glendening and Martin O’Malley would increase from $90,000 to $97,500.

Current Gov. Larry Hogan, 65, would be eligible for the maximum insurance and pension benefits when his term ends in 2023.