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UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA  
*Many Traditions One Alaska*

Date September 8, 2023

To Ronnie Houchin, Chair, UA Staff Alliance

From Pat Pitney, President

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pat Pitney".

CC Memry Dahl, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Michelle Rizk, VP University Relations  
Paul Layer, VP Academics, Students and Research  
Sean Parnell, UAA Chancellor  
Daniel White, UAF Chancellor  
Aparna Palmer, UAS Chancellor

Re Response to FY25 Compensation Recommendations

Thank you to Staff Alliance for your July 21 memo with recommendations for FY25 compensation. I appreciate all that staff across the system do to support our academic, teaching and service missions. I have reviewed the recommendations with CHRO Dahl, and we have discussed with Staff Alliance leadership prior to this written response.

#### **Compensation Recommendations**

##### **Reinstitute annual step increases (automatic each year)**

##### **Implement an increase tied to performance evaluation ratings**

Wage increases, whether step increases or inflationary adjustments, are subject to Board of Regents approval as part of our larger budget process. We are committed to fair compensation within our fiscal capacity and are therefore reviewing compensation benchmarks and practices, including pay for performance and across-the-board increases. For FY25, we are including a 2.5% increase for all employees in our budget request, likely as an across-the-board increase. Supervisors currently have the ability to recognize exemplary performance either through step increases or through bonuses; this should be part of the annual performance review discussion.

##### **Ensure positions are in the correct job family and that an employee's position description is accurate to the work currently being performed.**

As part of the annual performance review, the employee and supervisor should determine whether the position description accurately reflects the work currently being performed. If there are additional duties that are expected of the employee, the employee should request that their position description be updated to reflect that work.

##### **Provide a method of compensation for staff taking on the duties of an open position that doesn't qualify for out-of-class pay**

This may be addressed via one-time performance bonuses or, if the additional duties are incorporated into the employee's regular duties, via a step increase or reclassification. If the extra duties are incorporated into the employee's regular duties, the position description should be updated.

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### **Additional Benefit Considerations**

#### **Add Roth IRA as an option for employee retirement plans.**

We expect to implement a Roth IRA option in January 2024.

#### **Consider childcare support for those employees affected by those rising costs**

We recognize the added strains of childcare costs in the current climate; however, this is not a cost the university will take on. Instead, we encourage employees to contribute to their dependent care flexible spending accounts (up to the IRS \$5,000 pre-tax limit) to cover some of their childcare costs.

#### **Additional leave accrual at the 15- and 20-year anniversary dates**

Employees with 10 or more years of service accrue 24 days of annual leave each year, plus a personal holiday. This is at or above our peers based on the two most recent benchmark studies and competitive with major Alaska employers. Leave accrual is determined by Board policy; this is not a change that administration will recommend to the Board.

#### **Guaranteed caregiver leave**

Employees may use sick leave and annual leave when caring for an immediate family member with an illness, injury or disability, including medical appointments; this protects employee pay to the same extent that their pay is protected for their own medical needs. At this time, we are not in favor of adding an additional leave benefit. That said, HR staff are monitoring national conversations and trends about ways to support employees in the sandwich generation providing care for both their children and their aging parents.

#### **Improved parental leave**

##### **Allow sick leave donation for pregnancy/childbirth**

The university added five days of parental leave and short-term disability as new benefits for FY24. Unlike the leave share program, employees do not have to exhaust their sick leave and annual leave to be eligible for short-term disability. For new mothers, first six weeks of recovery after childbirth are eligible for short-term disability. The program provides 60% of weekly pay, up to \$800 per week for 11 weeks for employees after an injury or illness; employees become eligible for the program 14 days after the qualifying event. Combined, the new parental leave and short-term disability programs provide 17 days of paid leave in the first six weeks after the birth of a child, reducing the employee's use of their sick/annual leave. HR is planning information sessions for employees to illustrate how the various leave programs can be applied to different family and medical scenarios.

Due to the tax implications, we will not consider expanding the leave share program for new parents. As noted in the response to the FY22 Staff Alliance compensation recommendations, because parental leave is not considered a serious medical condition, this leave donation would be taxable to the leave donor as well as the recipient, making the process much more administratively complicated than our existing leave share program. I would also like to note that new parents who have a child with a serious medical condition are eligible for leave donations to care for that child if they have exhausted their earned leave and have filed and been approved for FMLA.

**Continue to support remote work options****Ensure support for flexible hours**

Supervisors currently have the ability to approve remote work and flexible schedules. In their decisions, supervisors must consider both the employee's preferred location/schedule and the business needs of their department and the specific job duties.

**Additional Recommendations****Re-evaluate breaks of service and how they factor into longevity in terms of recognition and retirement.**

HR is currently reviewing an extended look-back to have the break-in-service period expanded from 10 business days to one year. This would unify longevity for leave accrual and recognition. Retirement service credit is determined by the state; how TERS and PERS calculate longevity for retirement service credit is outside the university's purview.

**Opportunities for career breaks without losing seniority**

Under Regents' Policy [04.06.140.H](#) and University Regulation R.04.06.147, staff may request a leave of absence for up to one year, with the option to request a one-year renewal. During the leave period, the employee is entitled to rights and privileges as if they were in regular service except that they will not receive salary and will not accumulate annual or sick leave. The employee may continue health and life insurance programs to the extent provided by the contract with those vendors; employee would be responsible for both their own and the university's portion of those costs.

**Simplify the hiring process; modernize recruitment and hiring processes**

Over the past year, UAHR has made several changes recently to expedite the hiring process, including:

- Revising [search committee guidelines](#); making search committees optional for hiring non-supervisory positions;
- Simplifying student hiring process to application and background check, and increasing flexibility for student compensation;
- Expediting the posting of positions to allow hiring managers to upload search documents after the posting is live;
- Eliminating required approvals during the recruitment process (such as minimum qualification review and request to interview); approvals are now only required to begin the recruitment process and to make the offer to the selected finalist; and
- Integrating background checks, online offer card and I-9 into myUA.

UAHR is continually evaluating processes for efficiencies and welcomes specific suggestions for changes that would improve the recruitment process for both supervisors and prospective employees.

**Educate supervisors on all compensation methods and options available to them**

HR is planning increased supervisor communication on all areas of HR changes but importantly around in-grade adjustments for performance, retention, equity and bonuses. In addition, HR will focus on compensation during one of their upcoming "lunch and learn" Zoom sessions for supervisors, offered the last Wednesday of the month.

**Provide full funding for the ANSI and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plans**

The ANSI strategic plan was designed with the intent that efforts to improve Alaska Native success were to be integrated into all functions across the system. Because of this, we specifically have not focused on a singular budget or office for ANSI. Similarly, diversity, equity and inclusion efforts must be integrated into our culture and operations. We are in the final stages of recruiting for the senior advisor for Alaska Native Success at the system office; that position will have a dedicated budget.

**Prioritize and fund staff professional development and career development plans**

In August, UA HR assumed administration of the LinkedIn Learning contract previously administered by Staff Alliance; the platform will be available to all UA employees via single sign on (SS) beginning October 1. In addition, HR is conducting an inventory of training and development resources to identify gaps in training programs. HR's Employee Engagement and Development Center (<https://www.alaska.edu/hr/training/>) serves as a hub for onboarding, training and development activities. Funding for the Staff Development Fund was increased by 20% in FY24; I plan to maintain funding at that level for FY25.

**Improved mental health support**

Premiera will be rolling out a communication campaign around mental health wellness. Premiera's TalkSpace program allow for employees to receive mental health support via video, phone, and text; their Brightline program focuses on parent-child relationships. Additional information is available on the HR website under [Additional Premiera Programs](#). In addition, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available for all employees, their spouses/FIPs, dependents, and anyone living in their home. Our EAP provides free access, 24 hours a day, to master and doctoral-degreed clinicians via telephone and web or mobile chat. They also provide up to eight free sessions for short-term counseling needs. Their online tools include on-demand training and interactive behavioral health resources; guided programs for anxiety, depression, mindfulness, sleep, and stress management; as well as personalized motivational support.

**Start a tradition of "no meeting days"**

I appreciate the intent behind this request; however, given the various internal and external audiences our programs serve, this could have many unintended consequences.