

## Men paid more than women on supervisor staffs



The San Diego County Administration Center. (John R. McCutchen)



By **Joshua Stewart** - Contact Reporter

AUGUST 14, 2016, 6:00 AM

Women who work for San Diego County's five supervisors dive into the nitty-gritty details of legislation, work with county staff to develop programs to help 3.2 million residents and meet with community groups outside of typical business hours.

But compared to their male colleagues who do the same work, they're paid much less.

The 23 women who work for San Diego County supervisors are paid 62 cents for every dollar the 18 men who work alongside them earn. It amounts, on average, to a difference of \$37,380 in pre-tax pay per year, a sum that not only has implications for daily finances, but retirement plans as well.

The wage gap exists among the 41 staffers as a whole, as well as within four of the five supervisors' individual offices to varying degrees - Supervisor Greg Cox's office is the exception. The difference exists between men and women who have the same job even though women, across the board, have an average of 14 more months of experience in county government.

Supervisors said they treat men and women equally, and in many cases, while men currently have many of the most-senior jobs that pay the best, women have previously had these prestigious positions.

"I like to hire the best and brightest, regardless of gender," Supervisor Dianne Jacob said. "Compensation has always been based on responsibility, performance, length of service and experience brought to the position, and that is reflected in my current staff."

But the current disparity between men and women could cause legal problems for the county, employment law attorneys said.

California law says that men and women must be paid the same for equal work unless there are relevant and significant difference in skills and experience that justify paying one less than the other. It doesn't have to be an intentional choice to pay women less, but rather merely a situation where the two genders are paid differently, even if the disparity happens accidentally, said San Diego employment attorney [Josh Gruenberg](#)

"This is why this issue is such a major issue in our time," he said. "It's because the norm has just been to pay women less. It's not because there was a conspiracy. In fact, I would concede that in many different situations, it's not done intentionally. In some instances, we're not paying women less intentionally, we're just doing it, it's just happening. It's happening for a million reasons."

The Obama Administration says full-time women workers are paid 79 cents on the dollar and the National Partnership for Women and Families, an advocacy organization, citing census, says California women earn \$8,053 less per year than men. Critics point out that the White House didn't compare men and women with similar jobs, and in many cases, choices of occupations contribute to a part of the discrepancy.

Supervisors organize their office staff as they see fit and give their employees duties to suit their districts' needs. County spokesman Michael Workman said supervisors can negotiate salaries within a specified range as long as they don't exceed their budget. The discretion supervisors have and lack of standardization within and between positions in the five offices mean it's not always possible to compare one employee to another.

But in cases where two people have similar job descriptions, women, on average, earn less than men. The pay gap is most clear between men and women legislative analysts, a group of 17

staffers who look at pending policies, get input and brief and advise their boss before a vote. It's a mid-career assignment and the most common job on supervisors' staffs.

Women with this job earn, on average, \$61,553, while men earn \$82,953, a difference of \$21,400. The gap exists despite female legislative analysts on average having 36 more days of experience working for San Diego County.

Across the five offices and 41 staffers, the gap is driven by two factors: men have nearly all of the best-paying jobs, while women have not only the worst-paying ones, but oftentimes the jobs that aren't the worst-paying, but close to it. Chiefs of staff earn the most money in all five offices and, with one exception, this position is held by a man. Additionally, in all but one supervisor's office, the second-highest paid person is also a man.

Women abound at the bottom of the pay scale, and hold the lowest-paying job in all five of the supervisors' offices and the second-lowest in four.

The gap is most pronounced on Supervisor Ron Roberts' staff. Two men are at the top, the chief of staff, and the deputy chief of staff who also handles the supervisor's public communications. Compared with the five women who work there, they make an average of \$70,824 more. The difference in this instance is largely due to the senior positions held by men and the entry level jobs held by women. They respectively earn \$162,676.80 and \$109,678.40, more than the five women who work for the supervisor. There are two women who both earn in the mid-\$90,000 range, as well as three who earn nearly \$40,000 to the low \$50,000 range.

"The results would have been different if this survey was conducted when I had a woman as chief of staff," Roberts said. "The same could be said if I had hired men, as I have at times in the past, for these entry-level jobs. Looking at each individual's qualifications and job requirements, it is clear they are being paid fairly. Based on experience and skill level, I am comfortable no one is being overlooked and we have no gender gap."

Of the five supervisors' staffs, Cox's is the only one where women earn more than men. Pam O'Neil, his chief of staff, is in a league of her own as the only woman who runs a supervisor's office, and with more than 31 years experience working for county government, the longest-tenured.

Cox ultimately signs off on staff decisions, but O'Neil said she recommends an applicant and suggests a salary based on the candidate's education, experience and the job's responsibility.

"For me, when it comes to gender, I'm gender neutral," O'Neil said. "I've had more women, sometimes I've had more men. I pay by experience and capability."

In Cox's office, women earn \$2,527.20 more than men, on average, and have worked for the county for nearly 7 1/2 years longer.

In other instances, women have taken jobs where they earn less than men currently and previously on the payroll. Harold Meza works for Supervisor Dave Roberts as a community

representative, a position where he meets with civic organizations, neighborhood groups and others to talk and listen on Roberts' behalf. It's his first job after graduating from college, but he had previously worked as an intern for Roberts and was a Starbucks barista.

Nine months after Meza joined the staff, Dave Roberts hired Mayra Salazar as a community representative in the district's Escondido field office after she spent about a year working for a state assembly member.

She does similar work as Meza, according to Adam Kaye, Roberts' spokesman.

"For the most part, they're the same job," he said.

Salazar earns \$9,173 less than Meza, and \$15,517 less than her male predecessor in the Escondido office.

Dave Roberts said that Meza had relevant experience as an intern and could work one more weekday evening and one more weekend day than Salazar, and has additional duties in his position, so he is paid more. Additionally, after Salazar's predecessor left, the job description for the Escondido office was revised, Roberts said.

"It really wasn't a one-for-one change," Dave Roberts said.

Roberts was accused of having an improper but non-sexual relationship with Meza. In the spring of 2015, four women who worked for Roberts abruptly resigned and said, among other allegations, that Roberts showed favoritism to Meza.

Roberts had repeatedly said he has done nothing wrong, though the county settled the complaints from three of the women for a combined \$310,000.

A revised state law that took effect at the start of this year is designed to eliminate the gap between what men and women earn for doing similar work, according to Dan Eaton, a San Diego-based employment attorney.

The Equal Pay Act doesn't require private sector and government employers to always pay men and women the same wage. But when there is a difference, it has to be for a legitimate reason like education, training or experience, and those factors can't be something that is inherently tied to gender, and they must be a necessity for the job, he said.

"These kind of evaluations are going on everywhere, from San Diego to Silicon Valley and north," Eaton said.

The new law also makes it easier for women who are paid less for doing similar work to have success in court, Gruenberg said.

"Before, the female employee would have to prove that the difference in the wage was because they were female," he said. "This takes that analysis out of it. If the female employee can prove that they were doing similar work and they were paid less, they win."

As a result of the new law, some companies are auditing their payroll to make sure that there is parity between what men and women earn.

Original Article: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/politics/sdut-san-diego-county-supervisors-pay-gap-2016aug14-story.html>