

Alabama Legislative Pay

Background

According to the state constitution, the official salary of a member of the Alabama State Legislature is \$10 per legislative day. In addition, each legislator receives \$3,958 per month plus \$50 per day during each week the Legislature actually meets during any session.ⁱ

The most recent salary terms for Alabama's legislators were passed in 2007 under dubious procedures, only to be vetoed by Gov. Bob Riley. This veto, however, was overturned by the Legislature. Since then, opinion about the most recent salary adjustment has been divided between those who believe the Legislature voted themselves a pay raise, and those who believe the cost of serving is worth more than \$36,000 per year.

Recommendation

The Alabama Constitution should be amended to set legislator pay at the state's mean annual wage estimate as reported annually by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) or some other consistent measure of average taxpayer income. According to the BLS, the average salary of all 1,807,480 employees in Alabama in May 2010 was \$38,590.ⁱⁱ

The state should provide for the travel, lodging, and other legislative expenses with an annual cap. The annual expenses cap could be \$10,000, and would be figured on the following assumptions:

- A \$250 maximum round trip travel cost to Montgomery from any location in the State of Alabama. This assumes a round trip of no more than 450 miles, multiplied by 51 cents per mile and rounded up to the nearest \$50. Costs per mile and the total cost per trip would adjust as per the

ISSUE SNAPSHOT

Legislative pay is currently a combination of several different compensation provisions.

Legislative pay should be tied to the average Alabamian.

Legislators must be required to provide a transparent account of expenses before being reimbursed.

Internal Revenue Service's annual standard mileage rates.

- A \$250 maximum lodging cost in Montgomery, assuming a stay of \$80 per night multiplied by 3 nights and rounded up to the nearest \$50.
- A \$100 maximum meal cost in Montgomery. This assumes a cost of \$10 per meal for three meals a day, for three days, rounded up to the nearest \$50.
- A total of \$9,000 is realized when these costs are multiplied by a constitutional maximum of 15 session weeks, rounded up to an annual expense cap of \$10,000.

Require that all expenses be reimbursed by the Alabama House and Senate, respectively, and receipts for reimbursement purposes be posted on the Internet for each legislator, including information relating to dollar amount, date, and supplier of good or service.

ⁱ "2011 NCSL Legislator Compensation Table." National Conference of State Legislators (web), April 4, 2011. Available at <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=22490>. Access verified July 14, 2011.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "May 2010 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Alabama" (web), May 17, 2011. Available at http://bls.gov/oes/current/oes_al.htm#00-0000. Access verified July 14, 2011.