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New Public Service Attorney Salary Figures from NALP Show Slow Growth Since 2004

Washington (DC) — According to new research from NALP, salaries for public service attorneys have risen modestly since 2004, but among attorneys working in civil legal services organizations, as public defenders or local prosecuting attorneys, or as attorneys in public interest organizations, those providing civil legal services have the lowest median entry-level salary, earn the smallest increases in salary based on experience, and have seen the slowest growth in salary levels over the past 14 years. This is a key finding from *NALP/PSJD's 2018 Public Service Attorney Salary Survey* and is consistent with findings from earlier surveys, which have been conducted periodically since 2004.

The 2018 report demonstrates that, in general, practice experience brings with it relatively modest salary increases, particularly within civil legal services organizations. For example, the median entry-level salary for a legal services attorney is \$48,000; at 11-15 years of experience the median is \$69,500. Pay for public defenders and local prosecuting attorneys is somewhat higher, starting at about \$58,000 and \$56,000, respectively, and increasing to about \$96,000 and \$84,000, respectively, for those with 11-15 years of experience. **See Table 1 below.**

NALP's *Public Service Attorney Salary Report*, is based on a nationwide survey conducted by NALP among civil legal services organizations, offices of public defenders, local prosecuting attorneys, and public interest organizations, and provides salary information for both entry-level and experienced attorneys at public interest organizations as of January 1, 2018. A total of 347 organizations participated in the survey. The figures reflect salaries of attorneys whose positions involve primarily law practice and not organizational management.

The report categorizes salary outcomes both geographically and based on the nature of the responding organization. (Definitions for the categories used are available in the report's introduction.) For example, entry-level salaries at civil legal services organizations are notably higher in the Northeast (as defined by the US Census Bureau), with a median of over \$58,000. Among local prosecuting attorneys, salary scales are higher in the West. The report also includes information on the types of benefits responding organizations provide their attorneys.

“It is gratifying to see that salaries for public service attorneys continue to rise,” said NALP’s executive director James Leipold, “but at a time when private sector starting salaries at the largest law firms are on the move as well, the gap between large law firm salaries and public service salaries is highlighted. Supporting lawyers who work in the public interest with professional compensation packages that allow them to pay down their student debt, afford housing, and do the good work they do has never been more important.”

The report, taken in tandem with its law firm companion piece — NALP’s 2017 *Associate Salary Survey* — highlights well-understood, but nonetheless sobering distinctions between public sector/public interest salaries and law firm salaries. The median first-year salary at a law firm of 50 or fewer attorneys was about \$90,000 in 2017, not quite double the salary for an entry-level attorney at a legal services organization. The median first-year salary for firms with 51-100 attorneys was \$115,000. Moreover, the \$180,000 starting salary paid at many large firms in big cities, and the recent move to \$190,000 on the part of a number of firms, is beyond what even the most experienced attorneys can reasonably expect at a public interest organization.

For the first time in 2018, the *Public Service Attorney Salary Report* is available as an interactive web tool, which includes a series of visualizations that readers will be able to modify to meet their needs. These visualizations include tools for comparing salaries across geographic regions, salaries across different types of organizations, and salaries reported in 2018 with those reported in response to the 2014 survey. This new way of presenting the research will bring the survey data and the research findings to life for users in a more engaging fashion. (The report may also be downloaded as a static PDF.)

Different stakeholders in the public service legal community may use this report for many different reasons: to set salary scales, to negotiate compensation structures with unionized attorneys, to lobby government funding appropriators or charitable funders for additional resources, to educate law students about public service careers, and so forth.

The full report, including access to the interactive web tool, tables with salaries by region, community population size, and organizational type, and additional information on health and dental insurance and retirement plans is available at www.nalp.org/bookstore for \$50; the report is free to PSJD subscriber schools, their students, and their alumni. A list of subscriber schools can be found at <https://www.psjd.org/subscriber-schools>.

Table 1. Median Salaries Nationwide for Lawyers by Type of Organization and Years of Experience — 2004 - 2018

Years of Experience	Civil Legal Services						
	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2018
Entry-level	\$34,000	\$36,000	\$40,000	\$42,000	\$42,800	\$44,600	\$48,000
5 years	40,000	43,300	48,000	49,400	50,200	51,000	54,800
11-15 years	51,900	55,000	60,000	62,500	64,900	65,000	69,400

Years of Experience	Public Defenders						
	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2018
Entry-level	\$39,000	\$43,300	\$47,400	\$47,500	\$50,500	\$50,400	\$58,300
5 years	50,000	54,700	60,000	60,300	62,800	63,000	68,000
11-15 years	65,000	65,500	75,000	76,200	78,600	84,500	96,400

Years of Experience	Local Prosecuting Attorneys						
	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2018
Entry-level	\$40,000	\$43,900	\$45,700	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$51,100	\$56,200
5 years	52,000	54,500	60,000	62,300	61,400	63,600	66,300
11-15 years	69,300	73,000	77,500	81,500	76,700	80,000	84,400

Years of Experience	Public Interest Organizations						
	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2018
Entry-level	\$36,700	\$40,000	\$41,000	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$46,000	\$50,300
5 years	46,300	52,000	53,800	53,600	56,300	59,000	65,000
11-15 years	64,000	65,000	69,200	70,900	75,000	75,000	80,500

**All figures have been rounded to the nearest \$100.*

About NALP: NALP (www.nalp.org) is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and standards for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 40 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve.

About PSJD: PSJD, a NALP Initiative, is the premiere online public service job database connecting public interest law job-seekers with job opportunities at all experience levels. Students and alumni of PSJD subscriber law schools have free access to our job and employer profile database. Public service employers can post jobs at no charge. PSJD also offers an extensive array of career-building resources for law school career professionals and job-seekers. For more information, visit www.psjd.org.

NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information about NALP research, contact Judith Collins (jcollins@nalp.org), Director of Research, or James G. Leipold (jleipold@nalp.org), Executive Director, at 202-835-1001.
