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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **New Public Interest and Public Sector Salary Figures from NALP Show Little Growth Since 2004**

According to new research from NALP, the median entry-level salary for a legal services attorney is not quite \$43,000; an attorney with 11-15 years of experience can expect a salary of about \$65,000. The median entry-level salary for public defenders is about \$50,500; with 11-15 years of experience the median is \$78,600. The salary progression for local prosecuting attorneys is similar, starting at \$50,000 and progressing to almost \$77,000 for those with 11-15 years of experience. Finally, salaries for attorneys in public interest organizations with issue-driven missions, such as those dealing with women's or civil rights issues, start at \$45,000 and rise to \$75,000 with 11-15 years of experience.

These figures are published in the *2012 Public Sector and Public Interest Attorney Salary Report*, a biennial report from NALP that provides salary information for both entry-level and experienced attorneys at public interest organizations. The figures reflect salaries of attorneys whose positions involve primarily law practice and not organizational management.

This report serves as a companion piece to NALP's annual *Associate Salary Survey*. Together these two reports allow comparisons between private law firm and public sector/public interest salaries, a comparison that highlights well-understood, but nonetheless sobering, distinctions between public sector/public interest salaries and law firm salaries. The two surveys together document that the median first-year salary at a law firm of 50 or fewer attorneys is about \$80,000, almost double the salary for an entry-level attorney at a legal services organization. Moreover, the \$160,000 starting salary paid at many large firms in big cities in the U.S. is beyond what even the most experienced attorneys can reasonably expect at a public interest organization.

Finally, it is also evident, based on a comparison to findings dating from 2004, the first year of this survey, that salaries at public sector and public interest organizations have increased only modestly since 2004, typically by \$9,000-12,000, depending on experience and type of organization. It is also the case in general that most of that increase occurred from 2004 to 2008, prior to the recession, and not since then.

“During the last eight years, most public interest and public sector lawyer salaries have just kept pace with inflation. Most public interest starting salaries have risen between 23% (public interest organizations) and 29% (public defenders), while the consumer price index has risen about 22% during the same period,” according to James Leipold, NALP's Executive Director. “Meanwhile, during the same period the cost of a legal education and the average amount of law student loan debt have both risen at a much higher pace, which means that

## Median Salaries for Attorneys by Type of Organization and Years of Experience — 2004, 2008, and 2012

Years of Experience	Civil Legal Services			Public Defenders		
	2004	2008	2012	2004	2008	2012
Entry-level	\$34,000	\$40,000	\$42,800	\$39,000	\$47,400	\$50,500
5 years	40,000	48,000	50,200	50,000	60,000	62,800
11-15 years	51,900	60,000	64,900	65,000	75,000	78,600
Years of Experience	Local Prosecuting Attorneys			Public Interest Organizations		
	2004	2008	2012	2004	2008	2012
Entry-level	\$40,000	\$45,700	\$50,000	\$36,700	\$41,000	\$45,000
5 years	52,000	60,000	61,400	46,300	53,800	56,300
11-15 years	69,300	77,500	76,700	64,000	69,200	75,000

Note: For purposes of this table, figures are rounded to the nearest \$100.

despite favorable changes in the federal loan repayment options available to law school graduates working in the public interest, there are still significant economic disincentives at play as law students consider whether or not to pursue public interest legal careers.”

NALP’s biennial *Public Sector and Public Interest 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. As a result of this survey, completed by 423 organizations in 2012, NALP has been able to compile salary information by years of experience. The study benchmarks salaries for each type of organization for each of the first seven years, then in increments for attorneys with 8-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and more than 15 years of experience.

The “public interest organization” category is broken down to focus on three specific subcategories of organizations: organizations focused on civil rights; on women/children/domestic violence; and on health/disability law. This categorization allowed for salary comparisons among organizations performing the same type of work. For example, the median entry-level salary at organizations involved with either women/children/domestic violence issues or health/disability issues is \$45,000, compared with \$47,000 at organizations involved in civil rights issues. The report also has a section devoted entirely to compensation for federal government attorneys.

In addition to national salary figures, the report provides sub-national analyses based on region of the country and population. For example, salaries at civil legal services organizations are somewhat higher in the Northeast and South Atlantic regions, at \$45,000 and \$47,100, respectively. Among local prosecuting attorneys, salary scales are notably higher in the West. Salaries in larger metropolitan areas may be higher, but not necessarily by large amounts, and not across all organization types. For example, salary levels for local

prosecuting attorneys vary little between rural areas and larger metropolitan areas. Salaries for public defenders and legal services attorneys are somewhat higher only in the largest metropolitan areas.

Additional information about NALP research can be found on NALP's website at [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org). The full report, including salaries by region and population size, and additional information on benefits, is available from NALP for \$50, plus shipping and handling.

**About NALP:** Founded in 1971, the National Association for Law Placement, Inc.<sup>®</sup> (NALP<sup>®</sup>) is dedicated to continuously improving career counseling and planning, recruitment and retention, and the professional development of law students, lawyers, and its members. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at [www.nalp.org/pressreleases](http://www.nalp.org/pressreleases). For additional information about NALP research, contact Judith Collins ([jcollins@nalp.org](mailto:jcollins@nalp.org)), Director of Research, or James G. Leipold ([jleipold@nalp.org](mailto:jleipold@nalp.org)), Executive Director, at 202-835-1001. Mailing address: National Association for Law Placement, 1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20036-2405.