

July 19, 2021

Dear CalHR Director Ortega:

My name is Ali Tohami, an Environmental Scientist with the Department of Toxic Substances Control, Office of Criminal Investigations. I have been monitoring the bargaining process closely, because the outcome will factor into my future employment decision. Throughout my short career, I have seen first-hand the need for competent and experienced scientists to protect and serve California's environment. I have also felt the impact pay inequity has on the department.

To begin, pay inequity results in poor scientist retention rates. Several colleagues have left the department to seek higher pay and took their knowledge and expertise with them. This directly impacts the departments mission and ultimate goal to serve the state, and also makes civil service a less attractive option compared to the private sector.

Within the department, there is no distinction between tasks assigned to the Environmental Scientist series and the Hazardous Substances Engineer series. Staff from both are distributed across all teams and participate in a mix of technical and policy-based work without regard to classification. Environmental Scientists lead workgroups with equal frequency, often providing direction to Hazardous Substances Engineers. It is demoralizing for Scientists tasked with these responsibilities to earn at least 30% less than Engineers for the same work.

This is an opportunity for the Newsom Administration to demonstrate its commitment to those who work hard every day to ensure that California excels in scientific leadership and environmental protection.

CalHR's response will show whether this administration values scientists and our work. I urge the Newsom Administration to correct this pay disparity as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Ali Tohami, MMS
Environmental Scientist
Department of Toxic Substances Control