

Dear CalHR,

I am writing this in response to a request from CAPS to detail the work and financial issues facing state scientists that result from a lack of pay equity, or “like pay for like work.”

My program is part of CDPR’s Environmental Monitoring Branch, which combines collection of environmental monitoring data with fate and transport modeling. The work that we do is specialized and typically requires advanced education. Candidates for all positions often possess master’s or doctorate degrees, including part-time Scientific Aid candidates. I have interviewed applicants for part- and full-time positions since I became a full-time staff scientist. What I have learned through these interviews, and heard from my contacts in the environmental field, is that qualified candidates are being lost to the private sector. A key reason for many is that, while benefits are better, State work often pays scientists far less than they can make, e.g., consulting. To make matters worse, staff from my own program have transferred to higher paying but largely equivalent positions at other state agencies, such as CARB’s Air Pollution Specialist position. The lack of pay equity negatively impacts the ability of programs like mine to recruit and retain qualified staff.

This isn’t an abstract issue; for me, it’s personal. With substantial student loan debt and rapidly increasing costs of living in Sacramento, I have been unable to save toward a downpayment on a house. As of 2020, the last of my graduate school peers have left California for Colorado, Oregon, Minnesota, and other states where similar opportunities for work are available but living expenses are substantially lower. Pay equity will not resolve every issue facing Californian workers; however, it will help to alleviate some of the many financial and work challenges facing state scientists.

Sincerely,

Justin Kroes
Environmental Scientist
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