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Director of LRC gets 47 percent pay raise

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FRANKFORT — After slashing spending on education and social services earlier this year, legislative leaders voted 11-5 Wednesday to give their administrative director a 47 percent pay increase.

Afterwards, two rank-and-file lawmakers whose districts are heavy with state workers called on Legislative Research Commission Director Bobby Sherman to decline the \$62,160 raise or resign.

Sherman's salary will jump from \$132,840 to \$195,000, even as most state workers got a 1 percent pay raise this year.

"State workers will be upset and morale will be low," said Rep. Derrick Graham, D-Frankfort. "In my opinion, it's abuse of power and not morally right. Pressure should be put on those 11 who voted for this."

Rep. Carl Rollins, D-Midway, said he will call for Sherman's resignation if the pay increase is not reversed.

Sherman, a Louisville attorney who has been head of the administrative and research agency for state lawmakers since 1999, declined to comment. He serves at the pleasure of legislative leaders.

"I've never commented on personnel action. I'm not going to comment on mine," said Sherman, 56, who oversees 205 full-time and 245 part-time employees.

Sheila Schuster, a mental health and health care advocate, said Sherman's pay raise "comes at a time when much-needed services for people with disabilities and education are being cut. It's of great concern to see our public officials get a raise of this sort."

Earlier this year, lawmakers cut millions of dollars from the state's social services and education budget while increasing their own budget by \$10 million.

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said the pay increase was necessary to keep Sherman from retiring.

A majority of legislative leaders "believe he is an indispensable person at this particular juncture in the institution," Williams said. "Even the members who voted against the salary increase will say Bobby Sherman has an exemplary record."

Williams said Sherman would have received about \$9,000 a month in benefits if he had retired and that it would have been a time-consuming process to replace him.

Senate Democratic leader Worley predicted that a search for a new director would have taken as long as two years.

Others who routinely criticize state spending excesses are skeptical that Sherman is "indispensable."

"Legislators will have to answer to the voters about this poor decision of the use of tax dollars, which not only will raise Sherman's salary but his pension," said Jim Waters, a spokesman for the Bowling Green-based Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, a non-profit research and educational institute.

Waters noted that Sherman will make more than the governor, as do several other state officials. Gov. Steve Beshear makes \$119,506 a year.

Beshear's spokesman, Jay Blanton, declined to comment on the pay raise.

Legislative leaders approved the hefty increase after a 28-minute closed-door meeting.

When they resumed the public meeting, Williams asked that a motion be read that said Sherman's salary should be \$16,250 a month, or \$195,000 a year, effective Sept. 1 this year.

House Majority Whip Rob Wilkey, a Scottsville Democrat who is not seeking re-election this year, seconded the motion.

Wilkey noted "the importance of the position" and said the salary increase "is in line with what we pay for other similar positions throughout state government."

House Speaker Richards said Sherman "has done a good job" but the salary hike is excessive and "sends the wrong message."

Still, Williams predicted that Sherman's relationship with individual lawmakers will not be harmed by the controversy.

"There hasn't been a legislator Bobby Sherman has not been nose-to-nose with, and they still respect him," he said. "I'm sure the speaker and others will continue to have a good working relationship with him."

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