

# Vermont Legislative Research Service

<https://www.uvm.edu/cas/polisci/vermont-legislative-research-service-vlrs>

## Legislative Pay and the Inequity in the Volunteer Legislative Model

4TJ0 0 Tw 164a data compiled by Squire and Moncrief, the authors of *State Legislators Today*, legislative salaries vary widely across states.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to salary, most state legislators are paid “per diem” expenses to cover gas, lodging, and food.<sup>3</sup>

### Legislative Pay Structure by State

#### Vermont

Each general member of the legislature makes a weekly salary of \$811.68.

<sup>4</sup> During specr4dm 24 (4dme [(ab)-4

account program for health care expenses, dependent care expenses, or both, but the Governor vetoed it prior to the adjournment of the 2023 legislative session.<sup>8</sup>

### **New York**

New York has the highest paying legislature in the U.S with a base salary of \$142,000 per year.<sup>9</sup> In 2022 the lawmakers voted to increase their salary by \$32,000 but capped outside income to \$35,000. The reasoning behind this is to allow lawmakers to focus on their legislative job instead of taking time on other employment.<sup>10</sup> Per diem amount is unavailable, but the mileage reimbursement is 65 cents per mile (tied to federal rates).<sup>11</sup> The median household income for New York in 2022 was \$75, 910 a year, almost half of the base salary of a New York lawmaker.<sup>12</sup>

### **New Hampshire**

New Hampshire lawmakers make one hundred dollars per year. There is reimbursement for gas mileage at sixty-five cents per mile (tied to federal rates) but there is no per diem pay.<sup>13</sup> This means legislators may choose to hold other jobs that could distract them from their legislative work. The median household income for New Hampshire in 2022 was \$84,970 per year.<sup>14</sup>

## **How Pay Affects Who Can Serve**

misrepresentation in state legislatures.<sup>16</sup> Through data collected by the authors of *State Legislatures Today* in 2018 on legislators' self-identified occupations, the highest paid legislatures had the highest percentage of legislators that self-identified as full-time legislators and the lowest percentages of legislators who self-identified as retired.<sup>17</sup>

## **New York**

Despite having the highest paid legislators in the country, as stated earlier, New York legislators still fear that legislative salaries will keep some members of the population from being able to serve in the legislature. Carl Heastie, the Democrat Speaker of the New York Assembly in 2016, made the statement, “[l]ow legislative salaries compared to... the private sector tends to discourage members of the middle and working classes, particularly people with families, from seeking public office. The people who can afford to pursue these positions will disproportionately become the retired, [and] the independently wealthy.”<sup>18</sup> The most recent complete data available on state legislature demographics coming from a 2015 NCSL report indicates a demographic breakdown of one percent Greatest Generation, fourteen percent Silent Generation, fifty-two percent Baby Boomer, twenty-seven percent

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## **North Carolina**

A Democrat Senator from North Carolina voiced his concern saying, “[w]e want to make sure we get a great diversity of people who serve as legislators... Increasingly, the only people able to serve are those that are retired, those that are wealthy or those who are self-employed.”<sup>24</sup>

According to NCSL, the base salary for legislators is \$16,800 with an additional \$160 per day per diem.<sup>25</sup> The median household income for North Carolina is \$60,516.<sup>26</sup> The demographic breakdown for the legislature in 2015 was sixteen percent Silent Generation, fifty-five percent Baby Boomer, twenty-two percent Generation X, and six percent Millennial (birth year data was only missing for three percent of legislators that year).<sup>27</sup>

### **How Pay Effects Quality of Work**

Legislative pay can affect the quality and quantity of work significantly. Greater compensation for work allows for legislators to work in their position full time and devote more energy to legislative duties. While many state legislatures provide assistant staff to help schedule meetings and manage workloads, higher legislative pay helps legislators to hire additional assistant staff.<sup>28</sup> Eleven legislatures

