

MONTANA SUPREME COURT PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, May 11, 2023

Joseph P. Mazurek Justice Building
215 N. Sanders, Helena

Supreme Court Courtroom | Also Available via Zoom

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Bowen Greenwood
Clerk of Supreme Court
State of Montana

Chief Justice McGrath called the meeting to order at 1:13 p.m. In attendance were the Chief Justice and Justices Baker, Gustafson, McKinnon, Rice, Sandefur, and Shea. Judicial staff also in attendance were Beth McLaughlin, Court Administrator; Kevin Cook, Electronic Services Coordinator; Jeanine Blaner, Supreme Court Staff Attorney; and Amy Reavis, Supreme Court Law Clerk.

Item 1: Approval of the Minutes from March 28, 2023, Public Meeting

- The minutes were approved.

Item 2: Judicial Branch Budget Proposals

- Beth McLaughlin described the memo proposing FY24 base pay adjustments. She explained that HB13, the pay bill, included pay increases of the greater of \$1.50 or 4% per hour, whichever is greater. McLaughlin shared that Cathy Pennie was confident that the Judicial Branch could implement raises of \$2.00 per hour or 4.5%, whichever is greater, thanks to combined funding from the general personal services budget. The change would be effective May 20, 2023, and would apply to all employees, except short-term and temporary workers. The raise would result in entry-level positions receiving a wage of \$16.81 per hour. McLaughlin noted the progress—a year ago the wage for entry-level positions was \$12.81 per hour.
- Justice Baker asked how the new rate for the lowest-paid positions would compare with other branches. McLaughlin shared that it was within the neighborhood of other executive branch agencies, for example the rate was on par with what the Department of Public Health and Human Services pays for social services positions.
- McLaughlin noted that she may propose additional raises next year if the Judicial Branch continues to have recruitment issues. She stated that the Judicial Branch is struggling to hire law clerks at the district court level.
- Justice Rice noted the comment in the memo that managers will need to be prepared to use vacancy savings to cover these proposed raises. He asked whether there would be a problem with accessing these savings. McLaughlin responded that it should not be an issue; there is an abundance of vacancy savings to pull from.
- The Chief Justice commented that McLaughlin has made great progress bringing the Judicial Branch salaries in parity with other branches of government and that her work was much appreciated.

- Justice Rice moved to adopt the budget proposal; Justice Baker seconded. There were no further comments or questions.
- All justices voted in favor; the budget proposal was adopted unanimously.

Public Comment

- None

Chief Justice McGrath adjourned the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

Submitted by Amy Reavis, Law Clerk, on May 12, 2023.