

Pay hike for legislators, less than a week after Christmas

For the first time in eight years, legislators on Beacon Hill will see an increase in their base salaries after Gov. Charlie Baker on Thursday certified a pay raise of \$2,515 for the 200 members of the House and Senate, bringing their base pay up to \$62,547.

Governors are required by the constitution every two years to consider pay increases for lawmakers based on changes in median household income. Baker's team determined that median household income in Massachusetts climbed by 4.19 percent between 2013 and 2015.

The governor, in a letter to Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, indicated that he used the American Community Survey, which is produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, to review changes in income across the state. Data from 2015 was the most recent available through the ACS, officials said.

Median household income in Massachusetts grew from \$67,789 in 2013 to \$70,628 in 2015, an increase of 4.19 percent.

Returning lawmakers getting sworn into office for a new term next week will see their base salaries climb from \$60,032. The last time the biennial review led to a base pay increase for lawmakers was 2009.

Noting that lawmaker salaries had not gone up in eight years, Sen. Harriette Chandler said earlier this week it was "not a secret that people are hoping" Baker would authorize raises.

"Even a small increase would be very nice," the Worcester Democrat said Tuesday.

Earlier this month, Senate President Stanley Rosenberg said it "would only be fair" for lawmakers to get a raise as family median income has risen over the past two years. Referring to some backlash directed at House Speaker Robert DeLeo for handing out staff pay raises before Thanksgiving, Rosenberg said of the expected pay raises for lawmakers he believed there would "be an outcry about that, too."

Many legislators earn more than the base salary, with extra income authorized based on leadership duties, including committee chairmanships. Additional stipend pay can range from \$7,500 for a committee chairman to \$25,000 for the Ways and Means chairs and \$35,000 for the speaker and Senate president.

The Legislature most weeks holds one formal session and for about seven months of the two-year session only informal sessions are held, which most lawmakers do not attend. Lawmakers also stay busy with committee work, their own legislative priorities, constituent services, and meetings in their districts.

Many lawmakers also hold outside jobs in the private sector to supplement their incomes.

Baker had until next week to finalize any adjustments in pay, but his team announced the decision Thursday afternoon.

The raises come as Baker and the Legislature grapple with continuing state budget problems. Baker this month slashed \$98 million from the budget, drawing an outcry from lawmakers who claim the state can afford the spending.

Rep. Paul Donato, in a brief interview upon exiting the House Chamber after presiding over an hours-long informal session Thursday, said he's "very satisfied" with the governor's decisions to bump legislators pay. Asked if it was a fair increase, Donato said, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. The governor gave us a raise. We'll take what the governor gave us."

By: Matt Murphy