



Appendix B

**National Legal Aid & Defender Association
Civil Policy Group
Recruitment and Retention Committee
Survey Results**

**Summary of Comments
from Respondents**

A total of 784 comments were submitted by survey respondents in reply to two optional open-ended questions (“What is the number one change your program should make so that it is a place where you and other young attorneys want to work and stay for a long time?” “Do you have any additional comments?”).

Below are summaries of those topics most frequently raised in the comments (mentioned more than 25 times). Some comments were counted more than once as they covered multiple topics.

Salary (357 comments)

Summary:

- Salaries need to be increased – many are doing without “basics” of middle class life in order to work in legal services.
- May be easy to recruit single, young attorneys without dependents, but difficult to keep them once they start having families, buying houses, saving for retirement, etc., especially when faced with the prospect of long-term student loan repayment.
- Some are able to afford to take such low salaries because they are not the primary wage earner and/or they do not yet have children in their household.
- Some still live with their parents or take second jobs in order to survive economically.

Loan Repayment Assistance Program (136 comments)

Summary:

- Student debt is the most important issue faced by newer attorneys, and keeps many from being able to afford to do the work that is their passion.
- Since most law students accumulate large debt loads, loan repayment assistance for those working in public interest should be standard.
- LRAPs would help with recruitment and long-term retention, by making salaries go further.

Supervision / Quality of middle management (68 comments)

Summary:

- Newer attorneys want more support and advice from supervisors.
- Problem with lack of supervision and poor management – managers stretched too thin by having to manage their own large case loads and take care of administrative duties.
- Emphasis in hiring and promotion of managers on litigation experience rather than on people management skills results in poor supervisors.

Training and professional development (62 comments)

Summary:

- New attorneys cannot be expected to come into the workplace ready to perform; “trial by fire” approach to training is overwhelming and leads to burn-out.
- Concerned about not doing much litigation and not learning/using these types of legal skills.
- Connection to “mentoring” issue - more experienced attorneys need to mentor and train younger attorneys, to increase the retention and skill level at the organization.

Mentoring (40 comments)

Summary:

- Mentoring is necessary to do quality work.
- Pressure to take on large case loads as soon as possible without crucial knowledge or ability to perform adequately could lead to increased chance of malpractice.
- If effort made to improve attorneys’ knowledge and skills, they would be more likely to be committed to organization – would improve retention.

Opportunity to advance in the organization (40 comments)

Summary:

- Leadership seems stagnant, shows no sign of change any time soon.
- When there are management openings, filled by lateral hires from private firms or promotion from within central office; even fewer opportunities for those in “branch” offices.
- Cannot afford to stay long-term without advancement, promotions with higher salaries in future (long-term loan repayment for 25+ years, wanting to buy a home).
- Connection to “involvement in organization’s direction” issue – new ideas, new models for serving clients are not welcome.

Recognition of meritorious work (40 comments)

Summary:

- Important for morale to feel that work is valued.
- Showing appreciation and respect for work done by new/younger attorneys is itself significant, and does not necessarily have to involve financial rewards.

Long-term salary plan (36 comments)

Summary:

- Programs that don't already have one need to create a stable, realistic long-term salary plan that employees can count on. When programs establish their starting pay level to be comparable with other public service jobs in the area, they also need to plan for raises that are comparable.
- Salary structures should recognize years of experience and reward longer term service with regular increases, perhaps even large salary increases at the 5 and 10 year level.

Quality of top management (34 comments)

Summary:

- Top management needs to inspire with a shared vision.
- Management is disconnected from the work being done by front-line attorneys, who feel unsupported and undervalued.
- New leadership is needed, but is not being cultivated – this will result in problems for organizations when the current generation of leaders retires

Involvement in the organization's direction (32 comments)

Summary:

- Include staff in organizational decisions so that they feel they have a stake in the work of the organization. Young attorneys want to feel like they are vested into the organization and that the organization is vested in them.
- Young attorneys should be viewed as an asset to the organization, rather than as a liability; programs need to find ways to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm they bring to their jobs.

Benefits package (29 comments)

Summary:

- Connection to issue of increasing salaries. Employees want to be protected from having to pay more of health insurance costs.
- Also look for creative ways to improve benefits, such as increased flexibility with schedules and vacation leave, sabbaticals, and assistance with child care expenses (flexible spending accounts).

“Family-friendly” work environment (flexible schedule, 8 hour days, good parental leave, etc.) (28 comments)

Summary:

- Those who work for programs with good leave policies, part time positions and flexible arrangements appreciate the opportunity to both work and be a parent.
- Those who don't feel that the lack of these policies hurts retention and is contrary to the mission of their organization.

High case loads (27 comments)

Summary:

- Staff attorneys are dealing with large case loads, which can lead to them becoming burned out and disillusioned. They find their work demanding and emotionally draining, and feel that no one they work with cares that they are in over their heads.
- They want the emphasis to be placed on the quality of legal service to low-income individuals served as opposed to the quantity of clients served.