
2009 Equal Justice Conference

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and
Retention: How & Why to Improve Both

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

**Why do attorney salaries
raise a critical issue?**

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Today's student debt loads are much higher *now* than they were *then*, and junior attorneys feel extraordinary financial strains.

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Median Law School Tuition by School Type

| | <u>1987</u> | <u>Inflation Adjustment*</u> | <u>2007 Actual</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public – Resident | \$2124 | \$3877 | \$14,313 |
| Public – Non-resident | \$5706 | \$10,415 | \$26,432 |
| Private | \$8690 | \$15,861 | \$32,168 |

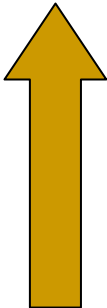
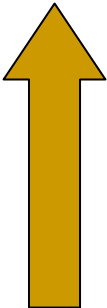
*Inflation Adjustment – 1987 tuition figures in 2007 dollars

Source: American Bar Association

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Average Amount Borrowed for Law School

(Law School Only – **Not** Including Undergraduate Debt)

| <u>Academic Year</u> | | <u>Public</u> | | <u>Private</u> |
|----------------------|---|---------------|---|----------------|
| 2006-2007 |  | \$57,170 |  | \$87,906 |
| 2005-2006 | | \$54,509 | | \$83,181 |
| 2004-2005 | | \$51,056 | | \$78,763 |
| 2003-2004 | | \$48,910 | | \$76,563 |
| 2002-2003 | | \$45,763 | | \$72,893 |
| 2001-2002 | | \$46,499 | | \$70,147 |

Source: American Bar Association

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Additional Findings from Legal Services Studies:

1. Among *all* surveyed attorneys, nearly half have school debt – median \$75,000. BUT...
 2. Among *more recently graduated* attorneys
 - Almost all have school debt, and
 - FLA study showed median of \$110,000
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Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Salary Data

*2008 NALP Public Sector & Public
Interest Attorney Salary Report*

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

2008 National Median Starting Salary Data

| <u>Organization</u> | <u>Salary</u> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Law Firm 51-100 | \$103,500 |
| Law Firm 26-50 | \$87,100 |
| Law Firm 2-25 | \$77,500 |
| State AG's Office | \$50,000 |
| Public Defender | \$47,435 |
| Local Prosecutors | \$45,675 |
| Civil Legal Services | \$40,000 |

Sources: NALP 2008 Public Sector & Public Interest Attorney Salary Report
NALP 2008 Associate Salary Survey

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2008 National Median Public Interest Salaries by Years of Experience

| <u>Experience</u> | <u>Legal Serv.</u> | <u>PD</u> | <u>DA</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Starting | \$40,000 | \$47,435 | \$45,675 |
| 2 Years | \$42,527 | \$49,891 | \$49,537 |
| 3 Years | \$44,569 | \$54,921 | \$50,684 |
| 5 Years | \$48,000 | \$60,000 | \$60,000 |
| 7 Years | \$52,100 | \$62,605 | \$65,000 |
| 8-10 Yrs. | \$54,580 | \$67,356 | \$68,044 |
| 11-15 Yrs. | \$60,000 | \$75,000 | \$77,500 |
| 15+ Yrs. | \$68,887 | \$80,330 | \$85,000 |

Source: 2008 NALP Public Sector & Public Interest Attorney Salary Report

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Factor Debt Back into the Equation...

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Average Borrowed for Private School: | \$87,906 |
| + <u>Capitalized interest/fees/misc.:</u> | <u>\$7,000</u> |
| Estimated Total Debt at Repayment: | \$94,906 |

Monthly Repayment Amount under Standard 10-year Plan: \$1092

Sources: Access Group; American Bar Association; www.finaid.org

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Can a Public Interest Lawyer Meet Repayment Obligations?

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Annual Salary: | \$43,000 (Nat'l. Median Start. + \$3K) |
| Monthly Salary: | \$3583 |
| Monthly Net Income: | \$2389 (Est. 1/3 toward Taxes) |
| Standard Loan Payment: | \$1092 |
| Disposable Income: | \$1297 |

Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

Does \$1,297 in Monthly Disposable Income Cover:

- Rent/Housing
 - Food
 - Car/Insurance
 - Other Transportation
 - Clothing
 - Healthcare
 - Anything Fun?
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Public Interest Attorney Salaries and Retention

NO.

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- Many public interest law grads extend their repayment term to 25-30 years.
 - This substantially reduces their monthly payment, but causes them to spend much, more money over time on interest payments.
 - It creates a financial penalty....
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Effect of Extending Repayment Term to 30 Years:

- Total amount owed at beginning of repayment: **\$94,906**
- Assume a 30-year repayment plan at 6.8% interest
- Monthly payment: **\$619 (still too high)**
- Total payout at end of 30 years: **\$222,735**
- **Total interest payout at end of 30 years:**

\$127,829
