

From: County Board Supervisor Chawla

To: Personnel and Finance Committee

SUBJECT: Establish Register of Deeds, County Treasurer, County Clerk, and County Executive Salaries 2025-2028

Introduction: Pursuant to Wisconsin State Statutes 59.22 the County Board shall, before the earliest time for filing nomination papers for any elective office to be voted on in the county, establish the total annual compensation for services to be paid to the officer exclusive of reimbursements for expenses for out-of-pocket expenses. The annual compensation may be established by resolution or ordinance, on a basis of straight salary, fees, or part salary and part fees, and if the compensation established is a salary, or part salary and part fees, it shall be in lieu of all fees, including per diem and other forms of compensation for services rendered, except those specifically reserved to the officer in the resolution or ordinance.

The compensation established shall not be increased nor diminished during the officer's term and shall remain for ensuing terms unless changed by the board. Court fees shall not be used for compensation for county officers.

Analysis: Elected officials are department directors who perform similar managerial duties of non-elected department heads and often time additional duties above and beyond non-elected department heads.

These elected officials are required to process all the same documentation including budgets, written and oral annual reports, interview, hire, supervise, train staff along with perform employee reviews, establish goals, standards and expectations in our offices, report to and work with our oversight committees on legislation regarding our offices, attend department head meetings as well as all statutory responsibilities of the office along with other duties that would be specific to other county offices.

Office workload demands elected officials not only be directors/supervisors, but also frontline employees who work side-by-side with staff for day-to-day tasks accomplished by end of day. Any future elected officials in these offices would have to perform the same duties as the current officers and be accountable to the electors that these offices are functioning efficiently, ethically, and providing the best service to Dane County residents.

As any other non-represented position, each county needs qualified, professional individual administering elections, staffing and handling minutes and agendas, issuing marriage licenses, monitoring and tracking dog licensing, as well as taking on additional county responsibilities as deemed necessary and proper. Counties need to attract and retain effective, intelligent people or risk losing the integrity of their elected offices and public confidence.

Supervision: In addition to the internal office staff, the County Clerk, Treasurer, and Register of Deeds assist with the work of 60 municipal clerks and treasurers.

- The County Clerk works closely with local clerks in the administration of elections, all election related materials, topics, and trainings, apportionment, legislative and governance issues, and many other items.
- The County Treasurer trains the local treasurers and clerks on the proper tax collection processes, software database entry, lottery credit additions and removals, correction of local assessor errors, returning and reporting of unclaimed funds, changes in tax related state legislation and administrative rules, updates to Access Dane for tax administration and public access to information, and other topics as needed.

In addition to training local municipalities, The County Treasurer also advises the Farm Drainage Board on their fund status, website updating procedures through Dane County, and best practices for working with property owners as their roles integrate into the Dane County Treasurer's Office.

- The County Executive serves as one of the leaders of the County overseeing multiple department heads as well as setting fiscal and political policy for the County. The County Exec acts as a liaison with the state and federal government and works with municipalities across the County.

Critical Infrastructure Designation: The Department of Homeland Security has designated County Clerks/Election Administrators as part of our nation's critical infrastructure. Critical infrastructure is a Department of Homeland Security designation established by the Patriot Act and given to "systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters" (Source: §1016(e) of the USA Patriot Act of 2001 (42 U.S.C. §5195c(e))). "Elections play a vital role in a free and fair society and are a cornerstone of American democracy" (Department of Homeland Security). As such, in 2024 there will be a Department of Homeland Security site visit to review and establish safety practices and protocols put in place for the security and protection of the County Clerk's office.

With increased reliance on technology, the Dane County Treasurer works with the bank and county IT to train and implement best practices for cyber security. The Treasurer's Office, in conjunction with the Controller's Office, has established checks-and-balances for cashflow reporting and online banking. Online banking practices range from the Treasurer's administration of all departmental users countywide, implementing and reviewing check positive pay and positive payee, and online payment processes requiring 2-person authorization.

In addition to banking security, the Dane County Treasurer often confronts property tax delinquencies as a first sign of property owners encountering personal hardships in life, which requires additional care and personal attention. The Dane County Treasurer regularly collaborates with Adult Protective Services and the Sheriff's Office to help those who may need to relocate their living arrangements while preventing harm to themselves or others.

Risk of Office: In the current political climate, County Clerks/Election Administrators are increasing facing higher risks and threats not only to their office but to their person. Many election officials have faced death threats, online harassment, and abuse. 45% of County Clerks/Elections Administrators in the nation expressed concern for themselves and the safety of other election officials and workers in future elections (Brennan Center – Survey of Local Election Officials). That same survey found that one in three election officials have been harassed, abused, or threatened because of their job. More than one in five are concerned about being physically assaulted on the job in future elections. The clerks most at risk nationally are those in blue counties in purple states.

Dane County clerks have received death threats, and will very likely be the target of threats and abuse in the coming election cycle. Considerable time has been dedicated to emergency management training to ensure the integrity of the election process. Planning for a new election center is under way and will be a challenging task in the coming years to successfully implement new safety protocols.

The newest threat to County Clerks/Election Administrators that emerged in 2023 is Fentanyl-laced letters. In November 2023 Fentanyl-laced letters were sent in Georgia, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, and Kansas (AP news, 11/18/2023). Fentanyl is an opioid that can be 100 times more powerful as the same amount of heroin (Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

The Treasurer’s office faces a unique set of challenges as well. It is common to encounter threats, fear, anger, and frustration because difficulty paying property taxes often comes as the first sign of issues within a person’s life. Trying to connect struggling property owners with helpful resources is not always welcomed by the property owner. Over the past decade, the Treasurer’s Office has received verbal and written threats – threats to the office, the county, and to themselves. To properly respond, the Dane County Treasurer’s Office has needed to request welfare checks, background checks, and cease and desist warnings

Below are the Department Head positions that are considered comparable with regard to level of skills, duties and responsibilities.

<u>Position Title</u>	<u>Salary</u>
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS	\$186,534
DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION	\$227,156
DIRECTOR OF DEPARTMENT OF WASTE & RENEWABLES	\$166,504
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT	\$174,158
Average	\$188,588

The current compensation for the Register of Deeds, County Treasurer, and County Clerk for the term commencing in 2021 and running through 2024:

Elected Official	2021	2022	2023	2024
Register of Deeds	\$112,174	\$114,137	\$116,134	\$118,167
County Treasurer	\$112,174	\$114,137	\$116,134	\$118,167
County Clerk	\$119,912	\$122,010	\$124,756	\$126,261
County Executive	\$135,560	\$138,271	\$142,420	\$146,692
Average				\$127,412

Recommendations: In the interest of equity and to balance compensation for our County leaders, compensation effective for the term commencing in 2025 should be adjusted to that of the average of the comparable Department heads. The recruitment and retention of a quality chief election official in a county specifically under attack nationally is a top priority for our County. The other officers are held to same ratio as above. Increase assumes 3% inflation.

Elected Official	2025	2026	2027	2028
Register of Deeds	154,739	159,381	164,162	169,087
County Treasurer	154,739	159,381	164,162	169,087
County Clerk	165,339	170,299	175,408	180,670
County Executive	180,000	185,400	190,962	196,691

Thank you for your time and consideration in establishing the salaries for the Register of Deeds, County Treasurer, County Clerk and County Executive for the 2025-2028 term.