

## Legislative Talk about Pay Bill – 5/30/2024

Good morning Chair Torres and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing time today for me to speak about a potential bill for the upcoming legislative session and to address a topic that is hard to talk about, but one that is vital to the stability of our counties and the state.

My name is Amy Burgans and I am the Clerk/Treasurer of Douglas County. I want to start today by explaining a little about what duties and responsibilities my title covers. You may already be aware that the majority of the Clerk in Nevada have multiple titles and therefore oversee multiple offices. Some of us are Clerk/Treasurers such as myself, some are Clerk/Recorders, and some are also Clerk to the Court. With the additional titles come additional duties and responsibilities. For example, in the clerk's office, our duties include a wide range of statutorily required tasks to include clerking board meetings, writing minutes, drafting agendas, processing marriage licenses, and accepting fictitious firm names and bond filings. In Douglas, we also run a DMV office and we are a passport acceptance office. My Treasurer title reflects the statutory responsibilities of the billing, receiving, and processing of property tax payments, overseeing the county investment accounts and daily depositing and balancing of accounts for all of the departments within the county. Additionally, the rural County Clerk's have the responsibility of running the election office for the County. This is not just an every-other-year job of overseeing the actual elections, conversely it is a vital daily responsibility of paying close attention to the voter registration within my county by ensuring that the voter rolls are clean, improving workflows, policies and procedures, and effectively implementing new legislation as it applies to elections. The elections aspect of my job duties consumes more than 50% of my tasks and

workload daily, and that percentage of time increases significantly during an election cycle. Currently, we are also in the process of implementing a top-down voter registration system alongside the Secretary of State. As you can see, each of the mentioned roles or titles includes responsibilities that could be a full-time job independent of the others.

In the last legislative session, we were not able to agree on and pass a pay bill to support the elected clerks in the state and protect the experience and institutional knowledge that retention of elected officials brings. Though pay is not the only factor in why we do what we do, the ability to support our families while performing vital services for the county is materializing into a major factor in keeping experience in place.

During the 2015 legislative session, Senate Bill 482 was passed that addressed elected officials' pay with increases annually through Fiscal Year 2018-2019. Since 2019, county elected official's pay has not increased due to a lack of legislation that allows for it. Unlike the non-elected County and State employees, county elected officials do not receive annual COLA increases or annual merit pay which keeps our pay stagnant on account of not having legislation in place to allow for an increase. On account of necessary, substantial increases in county employee pay the last several years, the management staff in my office are now receiving an entry-level rate of pay that starts at \$7,000 to \$12,000 more than my annual pay and will continue to increase annually. This upside-down compensation was not the case in 2019 when there was legislation in place that annually increased elected official's pay. At present, I am not the only elected official in the state who has employees that are making more than them annually. Consequently, this is becoming a potential hurdle across the state and the longer we wait to address this topic the bigger that hurdle becomes.

Across the nation over the last several years, inflation has led to an increase in costs in all aspect of our daily lives at a historic rate. Last month, the United States Congressional Joint Economic Committee released a report that outlined the increased costs Americans are paying. The costs they evaluated are only the ones associated with goods and services if our intention is to keep the same standard of living that we had in January of 2021. Broken down by states, the Committee found that the average Nevada household requires an increase of almost \$1,200 per month to pay for goods and services in the hopes of maintaining the standard of living we had just three and a half years ago.

<https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/nevada-inflation-report/>

So why is a pay bill important to address? Let's talk about experience and succession within elected offices. If I were to step down as the Clerk/Treasurer of Douglas County, what would be the incentive for my experienced management staff, who have first-hand knowledge of the various duties, oversight, and management of the offices that I am charged with, be in taking on the vast responsibility of running for office? Currently, if you ask them.... there isn't one. My experienced staff would be required to take a large pay cut in order to become the County Clerk/Treasurer and would be tasked with not only more responsibility but would also be open to public scrutiny in every aspect of their job and, as you know, their life. This opens the door for someone with little to no experience to come into the office, having to gain an understanding of the responsibilities of the office from the ground floor, and to work towards familiarizing themselves in a wide range of duties that take years to become proficient in, yet are vital to the enhancement of the quality of life of those living in our county.

Fundamentally, this topic is about professional leadership and management of not just the office we hold, but of the County. Something is out of balance when appointed administrators within the county are compensated 20% to 40% more than the publicly scrutinized elected officers who are accountable for protecting and enhancing the quality of life our counties offer to residents. If we are only talking about pay equity, we know that it is vital to compensate those who oversee every aspect of ANY office, at a higher rate than those who run the day-to-day tasks within the office. An invert of this continues to happen within elected offices across the state at an alarming rate, which is notable in leading to the loss of experience within elected offices.

I will close by saying that I know that this topic is a hard one to address. As elected officials, one of our top priorities has to be our financial responsibility to our constituents. It is difficult to pass any bill that incorporates and increase in the use of taxpayer money. Nevertheless, we have to balance fiscal responsibility alongside the need to compensate those overseeing vital services to the citizens of our counties with the goal of recruiting and retaining experienced people. This is crucial in maintaining the accomplished and skilled elected officials we have and an incentive for them to persevere in their role. It will also assist in the ability to have succession within the office and continue to recruit seasoned and skilled people to run for these offices. I'd also like to quickly clarify the misconception that the pay that is received by the elected officials in each county comes from state funding or the state's budget. This is incorrect, as the elected officials' pay comes from the county's funding and impacts the county's budget. Any increase in elected official pay would not change the state's budget.

I will leave you with one final thought; if the pay of our county employees continues to increase as it has in the past several years in order to keep up with

inflation and to retain experienced and skilled employees, we need to ensure that the pay of the elected officials overseeing those employees is given the same consideration and that the elected official's pay increases at a similar rate moving forward to make certain that the unbalanced compensation we are presently seeing does not continue to happen moving forward.

Thank you for your time today and I am here to answer any questions you may have.