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A Special Report on the Texas Department of Public Safety Criminalists' Compensation Levels

April 1996

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Key Points Of Report

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Overall Conclusion

Employees within Criminalist positions at the Texas Department of Public Safety (Department) are appropriately classified and there is not adequate justification to adjust the compensation levels by reallocating the class series or exempting the positions.

Key Facts And Findings

- All Criminalist positions reviewed were appropriately classified.
- No inappropriate reporting relationships were found.
- Market salary data indicates the Criminalist series salary range is below the market entry-level rate by 1.8 percent and below the maximum salary rate for supervisory positions by 4.9 percent.
- Criminalist salaries do not appear out of line when compared to selected exempt job series (Troopers, Game Wardens, and Conservation Scientists).
- Low turnover for the Criminalist series, 5.08 percent for fiscal year 1995, does not indicate significant recruitment or retention problems when compared with the statewide turnover rate of 13.5 percent.
- A salary administration problem may exist at the Department since merit increases have not been granted since February 1993. This leaves 56 percent of the Criminalists on Steps 1 and 2 of their assigned salary groups.

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This review was conducted in accordance with the Position Classification Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 654.

Overview

All 121 Criminalist positions at the Texas Department of Public Safety (Department) were found to be appropriately classified. In addition, no instances of inappropriate reporting relationships were found.

There is not sufficient justification to reallocate the Criminalist series to higher salary groups based on market salary data. Due to the public sector nature of criminalist positions, market salary data was collected from five regional states, three municipalities, and two counties. The State's salaries are lower than the salary survey data by 1.8 percent for the entry-level Criminalist salaries and 4.9 percent for the maximum salary levels for supervisory positions. Although the salary range for the Criminalist series slightly lags behind the market with regards to minimum and maximum pay rates, it is still favorable when compared to the State's overall position to the market. Data as of 1994 shows that overall, State classified positions trail the market by 6 percent.

When compared to selected exempt job series (Troopers, Game Wardens, and Conservation Scientists), the Criminalist class series' salary

allocations do not seem out of line. There is also no justification to exempt the Criminalists series solely because they have realized a loss in real earnings as a result of inflation. Since all state employees have suffered a loss in real earnings as a result of inflation, this situation is not unique to the Criminalists.

Turnover rates do not indicate a recruitment and retention problem. Although the rate has increased to five percent in fiscal year 1995 from two percent in fiscal year 1994, this does not indicate a problem compared with the statewide turnover rate of 13.5 percent. In addition, none of the terminations in either fiscal years 1994 or 1995 were for inadequate salary reasons.

An internal salary administration problem may exist at the Department due to a lack of merit increases for all classified employees since the quarter ending February 1993.

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The State Classification Office (Office) reviewed job questionnaires for all 121 incumbents in Criminalists positions and conducted interviews with certain incumbents and supervisors. Based on this review, it was determined that all positions were appropriately classified. This classification review consisted of a general review of positions for proper classification within the Criminalist series as opposed to a specific determination of the proper level within the class series for each position. The Office believes that agencies are in the best position to determine the appropriate level for individual positions within the appropriate

classification series. In addition, there were no cases of inappropriate reporting relationships: where a position reports to another position in the same salary group.

To determine whether the Criminalists' positions are appropriately compensated, our Office conducted a market survey of salaries of Criminalist from five regional states, three municipalities, and two counties. Data collected included the minimum and maximum salary rates of the organizations' job class series (entry-level through supervisory levels) and the number of levels in their series.

Figure 1
Market Survey of Criminalist Salaries

Organization	Minimum Salary	Maximum Salary	Series Width	Number of Levels	Percent Between Levels
SWIFS/Dallas County	\$32,232	\$55,392	72%	1	NA
City of Austin	\$27,082	\$49,566	83%	3	6%
Kansas	\$26,376	\$41,124	56%	3	21%
Oklahoma	\$23,763	\$48,401	104%	5	14%
TEXAS	\$23,532	\$45,420	93%	8	7%
Bexar County	\$22,548	\$48,300	114%	5	18%
Arkansas	\$22,238	\$53,378	140%	3	13%
City of Houston	\$22,126	\$62,166	181%	4	16%
City of Dallas	\$21,360	\$31,329	47%	1	NA
New Mexico	\$21,168	\$44,364	111%	3	24%
Louisiana	\$20,664	\$42,264	104 %	3	14%
Average	\$23,956	\$47,628	99%	4	15%

Based upon a comparison of the average minimum and maximum pay rates, the State trails the average entry-level salary for Criminalist positions by 1.8 percent and trails the average maximum salary for supervisors by 4.9 percent. Market data also indicates that the majority of organizations have only three or four levels in their Criminalist job series as opposed to the State's eight levels.

Although some of the other organizations pay according to areas of specialization within the Criminalist class series, the majority of these organizations also have wider pay ranges which permit greater opportunity for horizontal pay progression. They also tend to have fewer levels, which can hamper promotional opportunities. The State of Texas, for instance has an eight-level class series with five types of specialization. Other

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entities have only four of five levels in the class series, but have wider pay ranges.

Information supplied to our Office by Criminalists within the Department discusses the impact of inflation on Criminalist salaries over time. While it is true that all employees in classified positions have seen a loss in real earnings over time due to the classified salary schedule not keeping up with inflation trends, this is not unique to the Criminalists positions, (1994 data compiled by our Office indicates that classified salaries, on average, lag the local market by six percent.)

The information provided also mentioned that secretarial positions at the Department had progressed from a Salary Group 04 (class unknown) to a Salary Group 11 (Administrative Technician II) over time. While this may have been the case, this should have been a result of substantial restructuring of job duties for these positions and should not be perceived as an automatic hedge against inflation. The

Department is responsible for ensuring that positions are performing the duties as described by the State's class job descriptions.

In addition, the information supplied suggested that the Criminalists positions should be exempt from the Classification Plan and tied to other exempt positions within the State. It was stated that reallocation of the Criminalist series to higher salary groups would "only result in a temporary solution, since this increase would immediately be eaten away by inflation." Also, it was stated that "tying salaries to those of Commissioned Personnel, as Parks and Wildlife did, will eliminate the need for future reclassifications and result in equitable adjustments." Specifically, it was requested that Criminalists' salaries be tied to those of the exempt Trooper at the Department of Public Safety, and the Game Warden and Conservation Scientist positions at the Parks and Wildlife Department. As the following table shows, Criminalists' salaries are not significantly out of line with these positions:

Figure 2
Comparison of Titles and Salaries of Exempt and Classified Positions

Parks & Wildlife Exempt Title	Not-To-Exceed Rate	Parks & Wildlife Exempt Title	Not-To-Exceed Rate	DPS Exempt Title	Not-To-Exceed Rate	DPS Class Title	Step 8
Game Ward. I	\$30,595	Cons. Scien. I	\$30,595	Trooper I	\$30,595	Criminalist I	\$29,628
Game Ward. II	\$32,865	Cons. Scien. II	\$32,865	Trooper II	\$32,865	Criminalist II	\$31,656
Game Ward. III	\$35,123	Cons. Scien. III	\$35,123	Trooper III	\$35,123	Criminalist III	\$33,792
Game Ward. IV	\$37,393	Cons. Scien. IV	\$37,393	Trooper IV	\$37,393	Criminalist IV	\$36,108
Sergeant	\$38,528	Cons. Scien. V	\$38,528	Sergeant	\$41,579	Criminalist V	\$38,544
Lieutenant	\$43,068	Cons. Scien. VI	\$41,359	Lieutenant	\$43,800	Criminalist VI	\$42,528
Captain	\$45,326	Cons. Scien. VII	\$45,326	Captain	\$47,766	Supv. Criminalist II	\$45,420
Asst. Comm.	\$50,998	Cons. Scien. VIII	\$50,988	Staff Comm.	\$50,988	Asst. Manager	\$48,552
Major	\$54,381	Cons. Scien. IX	\$54,381	Major	\$54,381	Manager	\$51,864

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Finally, low turnover rates in the Criminalist series do not indicate a serious recruitment and retention problem for the Department. Fiscal year 1995 turnover for Criminalists was 5.08 percent, up from 2.7 percent in fiscal year 1994. Fiscal year 1995 data included six terminations out of 118 positions, but none of these were for inadequate salary. The Department's 1995 turnover rate for all classified employees was 10.09 percent, while the State's was 13.51 percent.

Based on this information, we do not feel there is sufficient justification to reallocate the Criminalist class series to higher salary groups. We also do not feel the information provided justifies exempting the Criminalist series for the sole purpose of tying it to other exempt series. The salary ranges are not significantly lower than the exempt series and the argument that exempt positions are not impacted by inflation as classified positions are, does not necessarily hold true.

Though our review did not indicate a need to reallocate or exempt the class series, there does appear to be an internal salary administration problem within the Department due to a lack of merit increases. The Department has not granted merit increases to its classified employees since the quarter ending February 1993. As of November 1995, 56 percent of incumbents in the Criminalist series are at Steps 01 and 02 of their salary group. This percentage may be somewhat

high due to the career track progressions which provide steady upward mobility in the first three years of employment, as opposed to incumbents moving horizontally through the pay ranges. However, there appears to be a significant compression within the first steps of the salary groups for the Criminalists.

This limited utilization of the full salary range does not indicate a problem with the State's compensation structure, but reflects an internal compensation issue for the Department. Limited opportunity for horizontal pay progression for employees increases morale problems and leads to pressure for reclassifications and reallocations in order for employees to receive pay increases.

A condition which tends to exacerbate the situation is the relative position of the exempt positions salaries with regards to the not-to-exceed rate and the relationship of the Criminalists to the classified salary schedule maximum pay rate. In most cases, the Game Wardens, Conservation Scientists and Troopers are within three percent of the not-to-exceed rate whereas Criminalists actual salaries are in the first quartile of their associated pay range. The Department may need to reconsider its policy for granting merit increases to allow for proper progression along the steps of a salary group to provide appropriate compensation for positions.

Appendix 1:

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Certain Criminalists at the Texas Department of Public Safety (Department), through Senator Ratliff requested that the State Classification Office perform a review of the compensation levels for the Criminalist job series. The objectives of the study were to conduct a classification audit of all full-time classified positions within the Criminalist class series in order to determine proper classification and whether appropriate reporting relationships existed between positions. An additional objective was to evaluate and determine whether the compensation levels for the Criminalist class series needed to be adjusted within the Classification Salary Schedule.

The study covered all 121 full-time classified employees in the Criminalists class series. These positions are in the headquarters and field offices of the Department's Crime Laboratory and Breath Alcohol Test Bureau.

To determine proper classification, all full-time classified employees within the Criminalist series were asked to complete position classification questionnaires listing their current assigned duties and responsibilities and the approximate percent of time spent on each of the duties. Supervisors reviewed and confirmed each employee's assessment of his or her duties and responsibilities. The State Classification Office reviewed:

- state job descriptions
- position questionnaires completed by incumbents
- organizational reporting relationships
- internal salary relationships
- classification history of each incumbent

In addition, we interviewed eight incumbents and three managers.

To determine whether the compensation level for the Criminalist class series needed to be adjusted, market salary data was collected. The State Classification Office surveyed ten regional public sector employers. The survey participants included five states, three of the largest municipalities in Texas, and two Texas counties.

Salary comparisons were made by taking the Department's full pay range, encompassing the entry pay rate for the Criminalist I (Pay Group 13, Step 1) through the maximum pay rate for a Supervising Criminalist II (Pay Group 19, Step 8), and comparing this pay range to the full pay ranges (entry through maximum supervisory pay rates) of each surveyed employer. A simple average was used in comparing the survey average minimum and maximum pay rates to the State of Texas' pay range.

Salary comparisons of the Criminalist positions with the exempt Troopers, Game Wardens, and Conservation Scientists were made by using the exempt positions' not-to-exceed salary rates and the Criminalists' Step 08 rate.

Appendices

Appendix 2:

Criminalist Class Series Background

The current Criminalist series was first authorized by the Legislature in September 1989:

- Latent Fingerprint Expert
- Handwriting Expert I, II, and III
- Firearms Expert I, II, and III

Currently, incumbents in the Criminalist series perform work in one or more of eight different disciplines or specialties of the forensic science field: latent print examination, firearms/toolmark examination, questioned documents examination, breath alcohol testing, DNA/serology analysis, drug analysis, toxicology analysis, and trace evidence examination.

Figure 3
Criminalist Class Series

Class No.	Class Title	Salary Group
6070	Criminalist I	13
6071	Criminalist II	14
6072	Criminalist III	15
6073	Criminalist IV	16
6074	Criminalist V	17
6075	Criminalist VI	18
6076	Supervising Criminalist I	18
6077	Supervising Criminalist II	19

When the series was authorized in 1989, it was designed by the Department to provide a career track for each of these specialties. Each career track includes five levels: four non-supervisory and one supervisory level. The entry level for each specialty begins at either the Criminalist I, II, or III depending upon the specialty. The Supervising Criminalists are responsible for monitoring the progression of their staff within the appropriate career tracks. Though most Department Criminalists are "specialists," some of the field positions perform two or more specialties. The career tracks by specialty are shown in the following table with the criteria for advancement to the next level.

The series was created to encompass multiple class series which were subsequently deleted by the Legislature in September 1991:

- Chemist Toxicologist I, II, and III
- Fingerprint Expert I and II

Figure 4
Criminalist Career Ladder

Latent Print	Salary Group	Progression Criteria
Level 1 - Criminalist I	13	Entry level
Level 2 - Criminalist II	14	After 1 year with acceptable performance
Level 3 - Criminalist III	15	After 2 years as a Criminalist II with acceptable performance
Level 4 - Criminalist IV	16	After 4 years as a Criminalist III and success before promotional board
Level 5 - Supv. Criminalist I	18	Available to qualified Criminalists with selection by an interview board

Appendices

Figure 4 (concluded)
Criminalist Career Ladder

Firearms/Toolmark, Questioned Documents	Salary Group	Progression Criteria
Level 1 - Criminalist II	14	Entry level
Level 2 - Criminalist III	15	After 1 year with acceptable performance
Level 3 - Criminalist IV	16	After 2 years as a Criminalist III with acceptable performance
Level 4 - Criminalist V	17	After 4 years as a Criminalist IV and success before promotional board
Level 5 - Supervising Criminalist II	19	Available to qualified Criminalists with selection by an interview board
Breath Alcohol, DNA/Serology, Drugs, Toxicology, Trace Evidence	Salary Group	Progression Criteria
Level 1 - Criminalist III	15	Entry level
Level 2 - Criminalist IV	16	After 1 year with acceptable performance
Level 3 - Criminalist V	17	After 2 years as a Criminalist IV with acceptable performance
Level 4 - Criminalist VI	18	After 4 years as a Criminalist V and success before promotional board
Level 5 - Supervising Criminalist II	19	Available to Criminalists V and VI with selection by an interview board