

University staff to vote on leaving civil service

Universities, not lawmakers, would have control of pay

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Fed up with stagnant salaries, classified staff members at five state universities are considering leaving the civil service en masse, hoping their university administrations will provide raises that the Kansas Legislature hasn't.

Speaking to the Kansas Board of Regents on Wednesday, Laurie Pittman, of the Classified and Support Staff Council for the state's universities, said pay continues to lag behind market rates, despite legislative promises to address the situation.

"We weren't at market (rates) in 2008 and have had no increases since then," Pittman said.

The classified staff includes such employees as custodial and maintenance workers and some administrative and supervisory jobs that receive hourly wages.

"Many times we are the frontline staff," Pittman said. "We touch the students' lives in every aspect of their academic journey."

Currently, the Legislature controls classified pay, but staff members at each school could vote to re-categorize themselves as "support staff," which would shift control to the universities.

Pittman said the classified staff at Kansas State, Emporia State, Wichita State, Fort Hays State and Pittsburg State were exploring the option and scheduling votes for this winter and spring.

The earliest votes are expected at Fort Hays State and Kansas State in late November.

Staff members at The University of Kansas have already made the switch.

Advocates of leaving the civil service say it would give universities more flexibility not only on pay, but also on such matters as recruiting and evaluating staff.

Opponents say workers would still be unlikely to receive raises because universities would have to find the funding for it, and that the change would mean workers would no longer be able to appeal employment decisions to the State Civil Service Board.

By statute, if classified employees vote to become support staff, they will retain their health and retirement benefits and universities may not cut their pay or lay them off.

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