

I am Michelle Bos-Lun, a second term representative from Westminster, Vermont. Having served for two years I am aware of the time demands and the compensation limitations that come with serving my community in the Vermont Statehouse.

There are three main ways that individuals can serve in the Vermont Legislature with the current compensation and lack of benefits situation:

- 1) By being retired, with social security, retirement and/or pension income and on Medicare for healthcare
- 2) Being wealthy and not needing income or benefits through work
- 3) Having a spouse who has enough income and benefits that you can serve, or having a spouse that has enough income to have your health benefits covered and you can serve by working another job (or more than one other job) in order to make ends meet.

I fall into the third category. My husband is a middle school teacher at an independent school where he and I are both covered by medical insurance through his work. He is paid year round for work at his school 10 months a year and for planning in the summer.

My husband is 62 and expects to retire within 5 years. When he retires from teaching, I will also need to retire from the legislature because though he will be covered by Medicare at that time, I who am six years younger, will not be. When he is no longer working at a full time job that gives benefits and the majority of a salary that we can live on, I will need to seek full time paid employment that will enable us to continue to pay on our mortgage and other expenses, and which will provide medical insurance for me until I reach the age where I will be eligible for Medicare.

I work multiple jobs. During the legislative session I work 50-65 hours per week as a legislator in Montpelier (and from home on the weekend and Monday). I also teach students in China online three days a week between 5-8 am.

I have colleagues who work 30-35 hours per week during the legislative session to earn enough salary and benefits to serve, and I honestly do not know how they do it. They must sleep very little and have no free time, which is true of most legislators I know. This is a hard, demanding job, with very low compensation and no health benefits. Are our constituents being well served by legislators who are working hard for them and also needing to work additional hours to serve? In most cases, I believe yes, but it is exhausting and not sustainable. We serve because we believe in the work we are doing and we want to work to make policies that work for all Vermonters. We advocate for the rights of Vermont workers, but we as Vermont workers are compensated very modestly (\$14,000 salary annually) for our work.

What happens is people who are retired, or wealthy or are married can serve in the legislature. For those who are lower to middle income or single it is very hard to serve and many don't even run for office because the numbers simply can not work. I have a friend in southern Vermont who is a single mother with a child in college. She would be excellent in the General Assembly,

but she can't afford to run and meet basic needs for herself and her child. I have another friend who is a woman of color living in southern Vermont who would be an excellent legislator. She has highschool and college age children. She would bring a much needed perspective to the House or the Senate but is unable to serve because the compensation does not make it possible for most people of low or moderate income.

During the "off session" between late May and December I work leading youth programs with the Governor's Institute, I tutor online, I work as a sub at a nature based preschool (at times multiple days per week), while I also am working for no pay as a legislator between 10-40 hours per week. In the off session, there are plenty of constituent needs. People write or call asking for meetings to address complex concerns, or for help with a wide range of problems from accessing unemployment to restoring driver licenses, to a myriad of other issues. It is our job as legislators to address these concerns during each two year term. We also go to conferences to learn more about issues we have to vote on (I went to the Renewable Energy Vermont conference this fall and learned a lot to help me understand energy policy, but by attending a two day conference in Burlington I was unable to sub at the preschool and thus missed a chance to earn income). In the "off session" is when we have time to visit locations that we need to make policy about, to meet with school superintendents, or police chiefs or local business owners. In the "off session" we are researching and working on ideas for bills to introduce when we are back in session. Why are we not paid when we do this work?

I have worked in many different jobs from education to social service to restorative justice and I never had a high salary, but when I worked full time, I got health benefits and even in part time jobs I was paid for training, paid to attend conferences and paid when I did work. Having half of our year in the legislature be unpaid, volunteer labor again ends up resulting in a legislative body filled with retirees or people of higher income. (Or lower or middle income people who are very tired from working so many ways to make ends meet). Our state would be better represented if we made it possible for people in different living situations and from different backgrounds to serve.

The current legislative compensation does a disservice to Vermont by not enabling all people's voices to be heard as legislators in the General Assembly. I hope to see this situation addressed soon. It is an important equity issue.