



## **2023-24 Legislative Staff Experience Survey**

# About the Survey

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- The purpose of the survey was to collect perspectives of legislative staff in order to improve State House employee experiences through awareness, transparency, and advocacy.
- It was designed by Massachusetts State House Employee Union organizers with prior experience in survey design and employee engagement.
- The survey included questions about job satisfaction, employee engagement, intended tenure, financial security, food security, and more.
- **202** responses were collected from December 5, 2023, to March 1, 2024.



# About the Respondents

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- **Legislative Affiliation** – **65%** of respondents work for the House and **33%** work for the Senate, with some with experience on both sides
- **Length of Tenure** – Approximately even distribution of tenure in the State House, from less than six months to five or more years
- **Age Ranges** – **74%** were 18-34 years old and **26%** were 35 or older\*
- **Ethnic-Racial Identity** – **82%** of respondents identified as white and **18%** as people of color (collectively across all ERI categories)\*
- **Gender** – **61%** identified as cisgender women and **37%** identified as cisgender men\*
- **LGBTQ+** – **30%** identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community
- **Disability** – **14%** identified as a person with a disability

\*More specific demographics are not listed to protect respondents' identities



# High-Level Results

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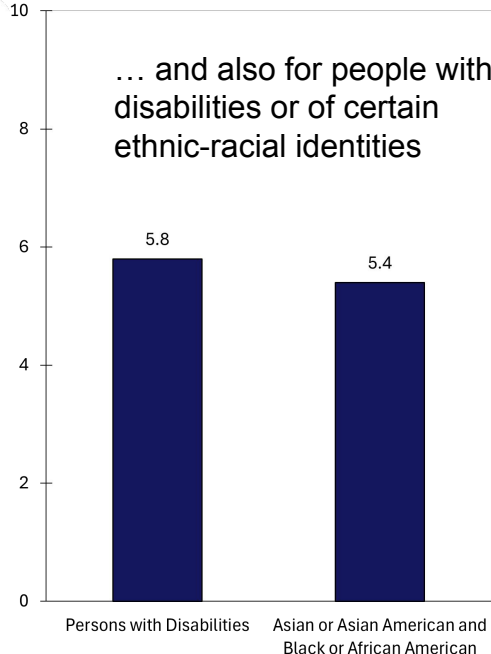
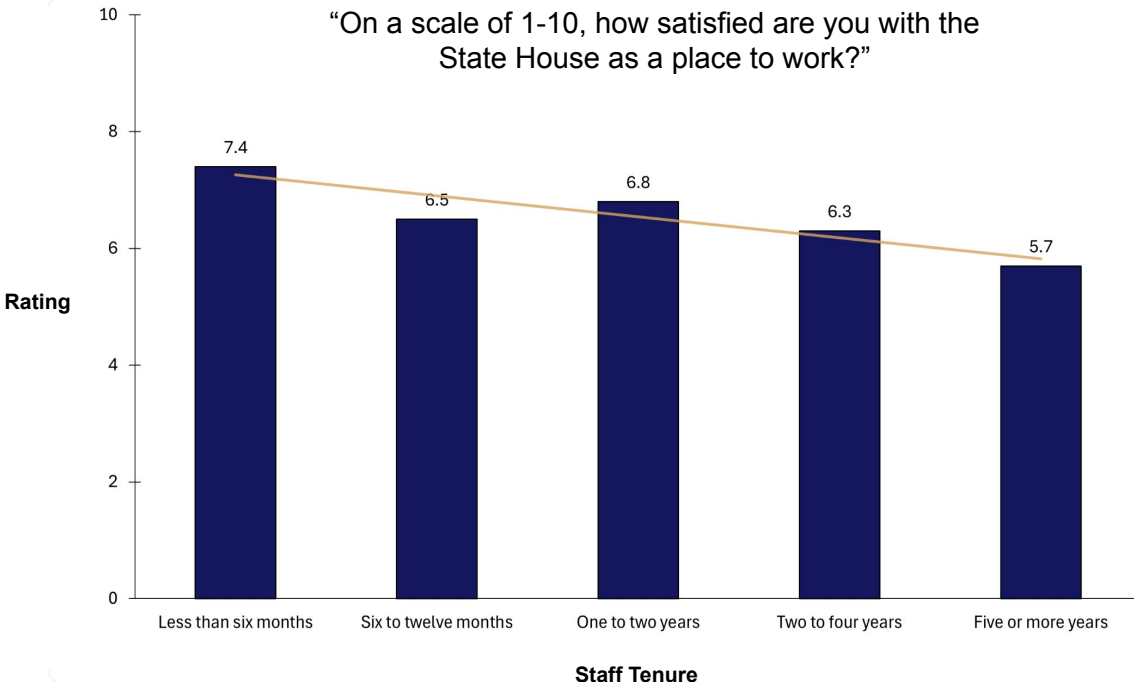
- **Staff satisfaction** decreases the longer one works in the State House and is lower for people of color and people with disabilities
- **Salary** remains a top issue for staff, with **9 in 10** reporting it as a source of dissatisfaction
- **Tenure** is artificially short, with **over half** of staff planning to leave in **<2 years**
- **Financial insecurity** is extremely high and leads directly to avoidable **turnover**
- **Lack of training** and **limited professional development** hinder the legislature's work
- Staff continue to face **disrespect, hostility, and abuse** from managers
- There is a widespread culture of **discouragement, demoralization, and lack of faith** in change in organizational culture



# Findings by Category

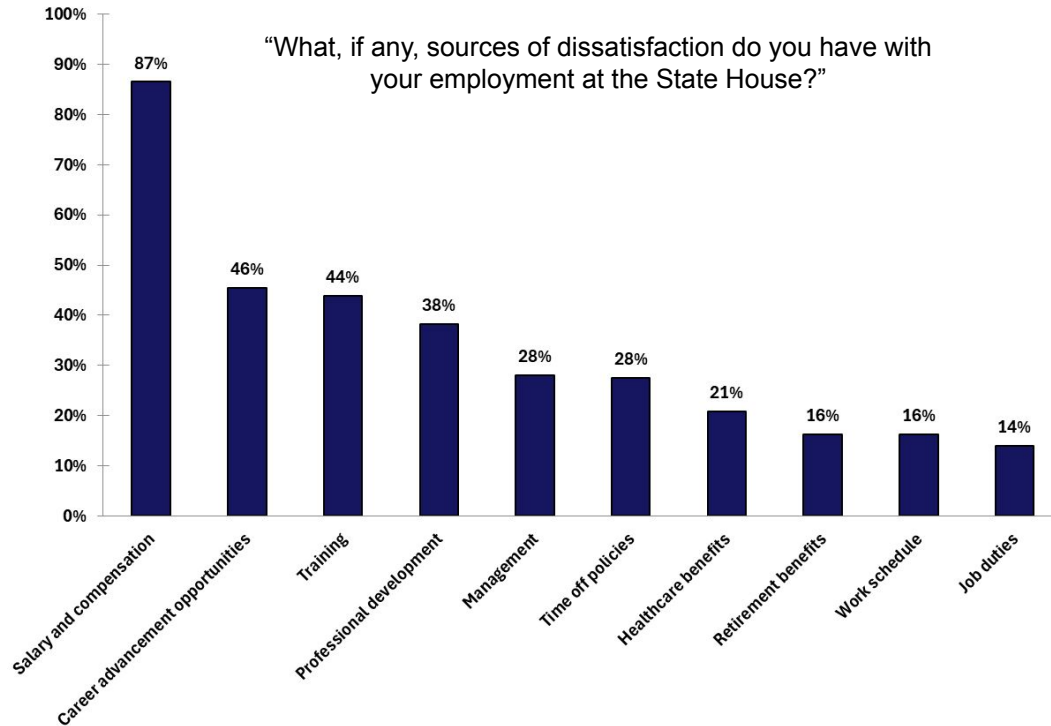
# Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction trends downward the longer one works in the State House...



# Areas of Dissatisfaction

Nearly **9 in 10** employees reported dissatisfaction with their salary and compensation



While these data precede recent salary adjustments in each chamber, they continue to reflect concerns raised in qualitative data:

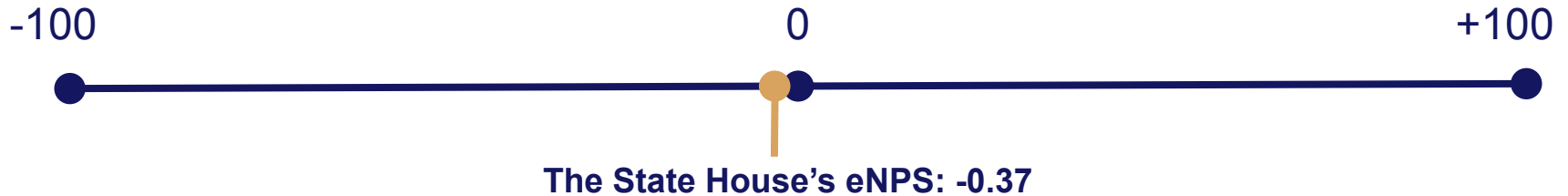
- **Unreliability** of salary adjustments and annual COLAs
- Need for **alignment** with market rate for state agencies and municipalities
- House pay scale does not consider **education level** and neither chambers consistently consider **relevant outside experience**



# Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

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- An Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) is a metric that assesses an organization's employee engagement.
- It typically comes in the form of a question like, "Based on your current work experiences, how likely are you to recommend working at the State House to a friend?"
- eNPS ranges from **-100** (all employees are detractors) to **+100** (all employees are promoters)



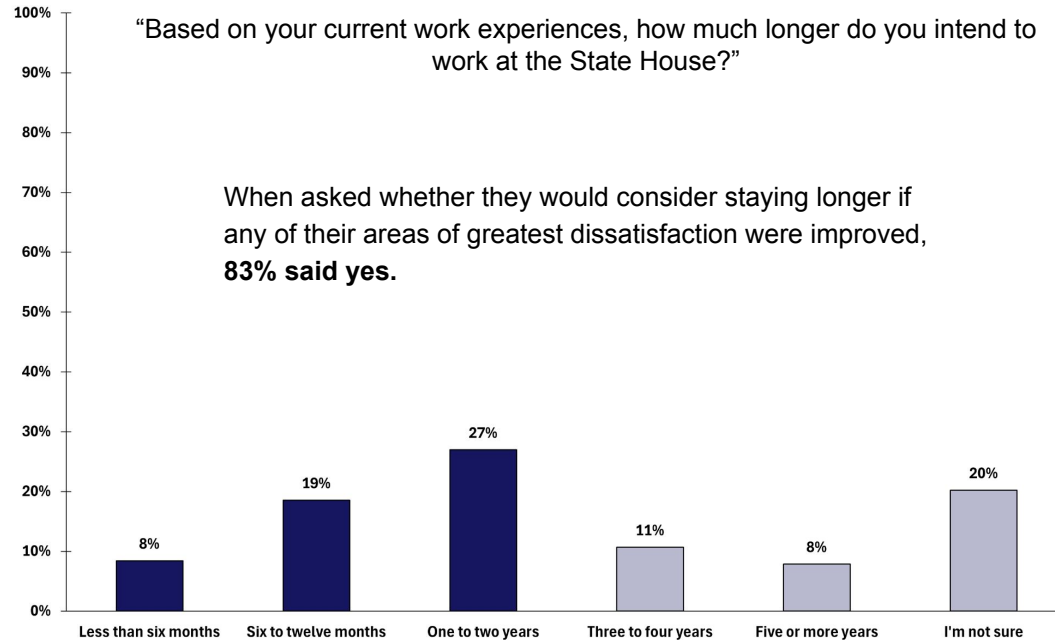
- The State House has **more employee detractors than promoters.**





# Tenure

## Over 5 in 10 staff plan to leave the State House within two years



### Driving factors in reasons for departure:

- Inadequate salary and compensation (59%)
- Concerns with working conditions, workload, or work schedule (21%)
- Limited career advancement or growth in State House (18%)
- Desire to further education (7%)
- Lack of faith in leadership (5%)



# Financial Security

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- Nearly **7 in 10** staff are worried about their **current financial situation**, with over **1 in 6** responding with the **highest level of anxiety**



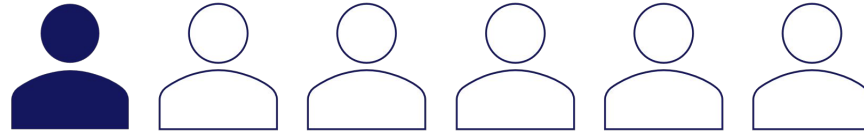
- Nearly **8 in 10** staff are worried about their **future financial situation**, with almost **1 in 3** responding with the **highest level of anxiety**



# Food Security and Supporting Dependents

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- About **one in six** staff somewhat or very often worried that their food would run out before they had money to buy more in the last three months



- Nearly **8 in 10** staff with dependents said they couldn't support their dependent(s) solely on their State House salary



# Feedback from Staff to Leadership: Salary

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- “We need annual cost of living adjustments, not 2-year retroactive adjustments as is currently practiced. We need pay based on education and experience, not just pay based on time in the State House.”
- “The view that public service workers like legislative staff should not receive market-rate compensation is not only baseless but foolish. It creates a brain drain that drives skilled talent away from the public interest, and is to the detriment of taxpayers, constituents, and Massachusetts' status as an exemplary state. The best way to resolve this is by engaging in collective bargaining with staff, which empowers them to share their frontline insights, including how to improve government and what will make them stay in public service.”
- “At the bare minimum, I believe staff should be compensated for their work experience and if they have any advanced degrees or are multilingual... I am a [REDACTED] asset to my office and the state house but am not recognized for that work or compensated as such.”
- “I have left jobs in the past for either a better opportunity or because I hated my job. This will be the first job that I have loved that I will have to leave because of cost of living pressures.”
- “Inflation is killing us. Student loans are killing us... rent is killing us too. Please help us.”
- “Think of your employees. Fight for them. Care that I cannot afford to live. Make a change so that me and my coworkers don't ALL need to keep having a second job after our 45 hour weeks... I feel extremely disrespected and underappreciated... I cannot afford the cost of living... Do the right thing. Care about us.”



# Feedback from Staff to Leadership: Benefits

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- **Transit Benefits:** “We also need free monthly transit passes. I spend \$1,000 a year on transit. Considering that the MBTA is state-run, I shouldn't have to take \$1,000 of my low salary and give it back to the state just to afford to get to work.”
- **Vacation Use:** “Not having any vacation days for an entire year when you start is downright inhumane and makes me want to leave.”
- **Standardized Training:** “Please provide standardized training across all positions in the state house so that it is not at the whims of who happens to be in your office, if anyone.”
- **Professional Development:** “There should be more professional development opportunities. There should be an even playing field for staff to develop their professional skills to better serve the communities they support. One reason why I support the union is because I was in a union previously and they were extremely supportive in providing professional development through conferences and had paid tracks that were free to attend.”
- **Mileage Reimbursements:** “Please advocate for... staffers to be reimbursed for mileage when they are DIRECTED by their bosses to go out and [conduct their work].”
- **Personal Resources:** “The fact that I have to pay for my own cell phone and use it on the job is unfair.”



# Feedback from Staff to Leadership: Turnover

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- “The culture of rapid turnover for aides is really demoralizing and discouraging as someone who would like to be able to advance further and sees myself potentially making a career at the State House, and it is a culture that I can see definitely starts at the top and trickles down.”
- “Many staffers want to work in this building long term, and the poor retention rate stemming from lack of pay and opportunity hurts our bosses and our constituents.”
- “The rate of staff turnover is not an inevitable outcome. It's a choice you make by not improving working conditions. For every staff member that leaves, you lose all the institutional knowledge they carried with them. Studies have shown that replacing staff costs an average of \$33,000 per employee.”
- “Give people who contribute so much of their own time and effort to your success a seat at the bargaining table where they can advocate for their own financial stability. Just like any other organization in any other industry, if you want to retain talent you have to pay for it.”
- “It's pretty clear turnover is a huge problem with the big reason being salary. Leadership doesn't know this because they pay their top staffers so much, but the entry-level workers who want to make this a career aren't staying. We have a lot of people in their 20s who want to do the work, but are leaving because it's unsustainable and unrealistic to serve the public with the level of salary right now. That's a drain of new ideas, future leadership, and institutional knowledge flowing out the door.”



# Feedback from Staff to Leadership: Policies and Culture

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- “It often feels like the only recourse to continued abuse and hostility in the workplace is through elections and public spectacle. New policies and procedures need to be considered and adopted... so that employees feel safe and protected when reporting and resolving abuse and harassment by elected managers.”
- “The experiences of staffers from office to office vary greatly, and HR should enact more building-wide standards to protect employees in bad situations. Some offices abuse things like comp time and expect staffers to work unsustainable hours without compensation.”
- “The Senate is deeply unregulated in terms of job duties for staffers and Chiefs of Staff are not questioned on their performance if they are tenured staffers. It is extremely frustrating.”
- “The way you prioritize your own power and relationships is toxic for democracy, degrading for your staff, and disrespects your constituents. Ask yourself if this is really why you got into public service.”
- “It should be a priority of leadership to keep talented, dedicated staff in the building. Our awful turnover rates will continue if staff aren’t adequately paid and don’t feel respected and heard in their workplace. A union is good for staff, good for legislators, and good for our constituents.”
- “You depend on our hard work, often times needing us after the 9-5 block. And we are happy to do it, especially in service for our districts and our communities. Many of you also depend on union endorsements to win your elections. WHY can’t you afford the same protections to the staff that work tirelessly for you, who dedicate their time to you?”



# Takeaways and Recommendations



# Takeaways

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- Recent salary adjustments were not enough. Additional adjustments to salary and compensation are needed to meet cost of living, including reliable annual increases, COLAs, and transit benefits.
- Lack of training and professional development, combined with high turnover, leads to massive hemorrhaging of institutional knowledge.
- High staff attrition is a choice, not an inevitability, made by leadership and seen by staff.
- The State House has more detractors than promoters among staff, with frustration rising in favor of unionization.



# Recommendations

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- Perform a **pay equity analysis** to align salary grades with comparable market rates in the public sector (e.g., state agencies and municipalities)
  - Account for length of tenure, education level, and relevant experience
- Conduct **confidential focus groups** with staff to develop recommendations for improving benefits, training, professional development, and HR policies
- Enact ***S.2014/H.3069 – An Act relative to collective bargaining rights for legislative employees*** to give staff a permanent seat at the table when workplace decisions are being made

