

Legislative Stipend Reform: “An Act to strengthen representation and promote democratic, transparent, and efficient lawmaking” (SD1301)

Filed by the Coalition to Reform Our Legislature (CROL)

Main goals of stipend reform

- Reduce legislators’ financial dependence on stipends controlled by Senate and House leaders, freeing them to represent their districts actively and independently without risking loss of pay
- Incentivize a democratic, transparent, and efficient legislative process that ensures a central, public role for all members of the joint committees and curtails lawmaking behind closed doors
- Provide adequate, equitable compensation for all legislators and make serving in the legislature financially viable for more people

Major innovations in the CROL stipend reform bill

- Link pay to performance – only provide stipends for positions that involve significant work
- Condition stipends for joint committee chairs on their bringing all bills to their full committees for public debate and mark-up (what used to be called “executive sessions”) and a public vote
- Condition stipends for leadership and Ways & Means positions on joint committee chairs meeting the conditions for public debates, mark-ups, and votes
- Provide a new stipend to all joint committee members for the significant work of participating in public debates and mark-ups

Specifics of the CROL bill

Sections (a) to (e): stipend amounts and recipients

- 75% of base pay (\$61,533/year in 2025-26) for the Senate President and Speaker of the House
- 50% of base pay (\$41,022/year) for the Senate Ways & Means (SWM) and House Ways & Means (HWM) chairs, Majority Leaders, and Minority Leaders
- 33% of base pay (\$27,075/year) for the Assistant Majority Leaders, Assistant Minority Leaders, SWM and HWM vice-chairs and ranking minority members, and chairs of joint committees with more than 50 bills assigned to them at the start of the legislative session
- 20% of base pay (\$16,409/year) for other members of eligible joint committees
- Representatives may receive only one stipend; Senators may receive two; Senators who receive no leadership or committee chair stipend may receive two 20% stipends if they are members of more than four eligible joint committees

Sections (f) to (k): payment of stipends

- Stipends for joint committee chairs, leadership positions, and SWM/HWM positions are paid in two parts, half with the legislator’s regular pay and half as a year-end bonus
- Joint committee chairs are paid their bonus stipend each year of the legislative session if:
Year 1: Their committee has held a public hearing and at least one public mark-up session on every bill assigned to the committee before November 1 and every report filed by the committee has been approved by a vote of the majority of the members at a public meeting at which a quorum was present

Year 2: Their committee has held a public hearing and at least one public mark-up session on every bill assigned to the committee, and on every bill has filed a report approved by a vote of the majority of the members at a public meeting at which a quorum was present

- Those in leadership and Ways & Means positions are paid the percentage of their bonus stipend each year equal to the percentage of joint committee chairs who meet the conditions for public debates, mark-ups, and votes
- Stipends for other members of eligible joint committees are included in regular pay with no conditions

Additional notes

1) Leadership stipends

The CROL bill limits the number of Senate and House leadership positions eligible for stipends to 5 for the majority party (Senate President/Speaker, SWM/HWM Chair, Majority Leader, Assistant Majority Leader, and 2nd Assistant Majority Leader) and 4 for the minority party (Minority Leader, Assistant Minority Leader, 2nd Assistant Minority Leader, and 3rd Assistant Minority Leader). This is consistent with historical practice and excludes recently created leadership positions:

- Senate majority: President Pro Tempore, Majority Whip, Assistant Majority Whip (all created in 2003), 3rd Assistant Majority Leader (created in 2015).
- House majority: Speaker Pro Tempore (created in 2005), second 2nd Assistant Maj Leader (created in 2017), four Division Chairs (created in 1998)
- House minority: second 3rd Assistant Minority Leader (created in 2017)

The bill also cuts leadership stipends significantly compared to those projected¹ for 2025-26:

- Senate President and Speaker: from projected \$119,632/year to \$61,533/year
- SWM/HWM Chairs: from projected \$97,200/year to \$41,022/year
- Majority/Minority Leaders: from projected \$89,723/year to \$41,022/year
- Assistant Majority/Minority Leaders: from projected \$52,339/year to \$27,075/year

While these cuts may seem severe, they bring leadership stipends back in line with their size relative to base pay in 1998, the year the voters approved Article of Amendment CXVIII to the state constitution. Article CXVIII established a base pay for legislators and an index for adjusting it over time. Per that index, base pay has increased 76.8% since 1998, from \$46,410/year to \$82,044/year. Applying the same percentage increase to the leadership stipends as they stood in 1998 produces results close to the levels in the CROL bill:

- Senate President and Speaker: from \$35,000/year in 1998 to \$61,880/year
- SWM/HWM Chairs: from \$25,000/year in 1998 to \$44,200/year
- Majority/Minority Leaders: from \$22,500/year in 1998 to \$39,780/year
- Assistant Majority/Minority Leaders: from \$15,000/year in 1998 to \$26,520/year

At the lower stipend levels in the CROL bill, the total compensation of the Senate President and Speaker of the House (\$143,577/year) would be the fourth highest among all state legislatures, behind New York (\$183,500/year), Pennsylvania (\$171,741/year), and California (\$147,446/year).

¹ Projections include the 9.59125% increase to all legislative stipends announced in late December 2024.

2) Committee stipends

The CROL bill provides for stipends for the chairs of SWM, HWM, and all joint committees to which more than 50 bills are referred by March 1 of the first year of session (“seasonably-filed” bills). Based on the number of bills referred to joint committees in the 2023-24 session, chairs of 26 of the current 31 joint committees would be eligible for stipends (this could change in future sessions). The 5 ineligible committees based on the 2023-24 session would be Bonding, Capital Expenditures, and State Assets (12 bills), Community Development and Small Businesses (32 bills), Emergency Preparedness and Management (19 bills), Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion (0 bills), and Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development (40 bills).

Chairs of all eligible joint committees would receive the same stipend (33% of base pay). Compared to the projected stipends for 2025-26, this would mean a substantial reduction for the chairs of 9 of the 26 eligible joint committees (from \$44,862/year to \$27,705/year). It is consistent, however, with applying the index in Article CXVIII to the stipend that existed for those chairs in 1998 (from \$15,000/year to \$26,520/year). For the chairs of the other 17 eligible joint committees, the stipend in the CROL bill would be a modest increase over the projected stipend (from \$22,432/year to \$27,705/year) and significantly more than applying the index in Article CXVIII to the stipend that existed for those chairs in 1998 (from \$7,500/year to \$13,260/year). The current practice of having different stipends for different committee chairs opens the door to arbitrary distinctions and to assigning chairs based on stipend amount rather than more appropriate criteria. Providing the same stipend for all eligible chairs would eliminate these risks, create an incentive to rationalize the joint committees’ jurisdictions to make workloads more even, and improve pay equity.

Chairs of Senate and House standing committees other than SWM and HWM would be ineligible for stipends. Most of these committees handle no bills and do little or no other significant work. Some are redundant with other stipended positions or with professional staff in the legislature’s human resources, facilities, and legal offices.

The CROL bill provides for stipends (33% of base pay) for two non-leadership, non-chair positions in both the Senate and House: the Vice-Chair and the Ranking Minority Member of SWM and HWM. This is in recognition of the uniquely heavy workloads of these committees. No other vice-chairs or ranking minority members would be eligible for stipends.

The CROL bill provides a new 20% stipend for other (e.g., non-chair) members of eligible joint committees. The bill assumes that leadership and chairs will respond to the conditions on their stipends by holding public mark-up sessions and votes on all bills. As a result, other members of joint committees will have to put significant time and effort into committee work. At present, they may attend public hearings but otherwise they play little role in shaping bills in committee. By contrast, public mark-up sessions and votes, attended by constituents, advocates, and the press, would create expectations for them to be present, prepared, and active. Those eligible for the new stipend would include all senators and representatives who receive no other stipend as well as senators who receive a leadership or chair stipend and, due to the relatively small number of senators, also serve as members of other joint committees. Senators who receive no other stipend and serve on more than four eligible joint committees would receive two of these stipends.

3) Impact of CROL bill on leadership control over legislator pay

The CROL bill would significantly reduce leadership's control over legislator pay. Compared to projections for the 2025-26 session,² the bill would cut the number of stipends controlled by the Senate President from 68 to 31 and by the House Speaker from 94 to 31. This is consistent with historical levels. In the House, for example, the number of majority party stipends was between 29 and 34 from 1979 (when the House assumed its current size of 160 members) until 1998.

In dollar terms (again compared to projections for 2025-26), the CROL bill would reduce the amount of stipend pay controlled by the Senate President from \$1,956,587 to \$867,219 and by the House Speaker from \$2,423,155 to \$867,219. Expressed as a percentage of total legislator compensation (base pay plus stipends), the share of Democratic legislators' compensation under leadership control would fall from 41% to 20% in the Senate and from 18% to 6% in the House. This too is consistent with historical levels. Stipends under the Speaker's control made up between 6% and 8% of Democratic legislators' total compensation from 1979 to as recently as 2015.

On the minority party side, the number of stipends controlled by the Senate Minority Leader would increase from 3 to 4 (3 assistant minority leaders and the ranking minority member of SWM) but the amount of stipend pay would fall from \$209,356 to \$108,300 and from 39% to 22% of minority party members' total compensation. The number of stipends controlled by the House Minority Leader would fall from 12 to 4 as a result of eliminating stipends for a second 3rd Assistant Minority Leader and the ranking minority members of 7 joint committees (for which stipends were created in 2017). The amount of stipend pay under the House Minority Leader's control would fall from \$411,242 to \$108,300 and from 17% to 4% of minority party members' total compensation.

Senate and House leaders would have little if any control over the new stipend for eligible joint committee members. While these leaders have the power to make committee appointments, it is almost certain that every legislator not receiving another stipend would be a member of at least one eligible joint committee. In addition to compensating for the significant work legislators would be expected to do on joint committees holding public mark-up sessions and votes, the new stipend would make serving in the legislature financially viable for more people.

4) Impact of CROL bill on pay equity among legislators

By limiting stipends to positions that involve significant work, reducing the size of leadership and committee chair stipends to levels consistent with Article CXVIII, equalizing the stipends for all joint committee chairs, and creating a new stipend for other joint committee members, the CROL bill would significantly improve pay equity among legislators. Compared to projections for the 2025-26 session, it would both reduce the number of "pay grades" as well as shrink the gap between the highest and lowest-paid legislators³:

² Projections for 2025-26 assume the same number of leadership and committee stipends as in the 2023-24 session and the increases in base salary (11.39% to \$82,044/year) and stipends (9.59125%) announced in late December 2024.

³ The pay shown here does not include the expense account for legislators, projected in 2025-26 to be \$22,431 for those living 50 miles or less from the State House and \$29,908 for those living more than 50 miles from the State House.

Projected 2025-26 Senate pay structure

1 at \$201,676
1 at \$194,199
1 at \$187,019
4 at \$179,245
2 at \$171,767
2 at \$156,815
4 at \$149,338
6 at \$134,681
4 at \$134,383
5 at \$126,908
10 at \$112,251

Senate pay structure under CROL bill

1 at \$143,577
3 at \$139,475
33 at \$125,528
3 at \$114,862

Projected 2025-26 House pay structure

1 at \$201,676
1 at \$179,244
2 at \$171,767
1 at \$156,812
7 at \$134,383
20 at \$126,906
49 at \$104,476
27 at \$89,819
52 at \$82,044

House pay structure under CROL bill

1 at \$143,577
3 at \$123,066
33 at \$109,119
123 at \$98,453

5) Cost impact of CROL bill

The total projected cost of legislative stipends in 2025 is \$5.4 million (including the Senate President, Speaker, and Senate and House minority leaders). The total cost of stipends under the CROL bill depends on several factors, including the number of eligible joint committee chairs and the distribution of leadership and committee positions among Senators receiving more than one stipend. The best estimate is it would cost about \$500,000 less than the projected cost for 2025.

6) Comparative data on House leadership/committee chair stipends (majority party only)

State	# of stipends	Base pay	Stipends as % of base pay	# in majority party	Total # in chamber
MA projected	95	\$ 82,044	9% - 146%	134	160
MA per CROL bill	32	\$ 82,044	33% - 75%	134	160
CA	2	\$128,215	7% - 15%	62	80
IL	58	\$ 89,675	12% - 33%	78	118
MI	4	\$ 71,685	7% - 34%	56	110
NY	5	\$142,000	13% - 29%	103	150
OH	69	\$ 71,099	9% - 56%	67	99
PA	8	\$110,016	14% - 56%	102	203
WI	1	\$ 54,408	0.6%	64	99
US House	2	\$174,000	11% - 28%	220	435