



NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: October 9, 1984

CENTER SAYS COMPARABLE WORTH TO BE IMPORTANT PERSONNEL ISSUE IN N.C.

The concept of equal pay for jobs of equal worth is likely to be the most important personnel issue in the 1980s, says the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The Center released its research today on how implementation of "comparable worth" might affect personnel systems in state and local governments and perhaps private businesses in North Carolina.

In a special section of its quarterly magazine, North Carolina Insight, the Center reports:

* North Carolina is one of 25 states that is conducting a study of its state job classification system. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is discrimination against females in pay rates for jobs that are dissimilar but which have equally difficult content, responsibilities, and hazards. Comparable worth studies focus on a point-based, quantitative job-evaluation system through which dissimilar jobs can be compared, particularly male-dominated positions (e.g., an elevator inspector) and female-dominated positions (e.g., a lead nurse).

* North Carolina state government has more positions potentially affected by these studies than any of the 25 states, except New York. In North Carolina, 83,000 positions are covered by the State Personnel Act and are included in the comparable worth study mandated by the 1984 legislature.

* A preliminary state study in 1982 found that three of every four state employees work in jobs dominated by either males or females. That same study found that women in state government make only 82 percent of men's salaries. But this is better than national figures, where females make about 60 percent of what males make. In the same "pay grade," females in N.C. state government are paid 95% as much as males. Each of the 47 pay grades (Grade 50 to Grade 96) in the state personnel system has nine pay steps.

Writers Examine Pros and Cons of Comparable Worth

In this special 20-page section of Insight, five writers, including Secretary of Administration Jane S. Patterson and State Personnel Director Harold H. Webb, review the pros and cons of whether to incorporate the principle of comparable worth into the state personnel system.

Proponents of comparable worth say North Carolina needs to incorporate comparable worth into its pay system in order to redress possible discrimination that has caused female employees in state government to get 18 percent less pay than males. They also say that a quantitative, point-based evaluation process would eliminate much of the subjectivity in the present pay system.

Opponents say that implementation of comparable worth amounts to interference with competitive, free-market pay rates. They also question the validity of job evaluation methods based on point rating systems. Finally, opponents express concern about the cost of implementing such a system.

Where North Carolina Stands

Implementation of comparable worth in other states like Minnesota and Washington state has cost about 4 percent of the appropriation for the state payroll. In North Carolina, the Center says that would amount to about \$36.8 million.

The 1984 General Assembly appropriated \$650,000 for a pay equity study. State Budget Officer John A. Williams Jr. was directed to contract with a private firm "to study the State Personnel System so it can identify wage policies that inhibit pay equity and develop a job evaluation and pay system" The legislature also directed that the study consider the influence of "supply and demand on the relevant job market for a given job category"

Seven state senators and seven representatives have been appointed to oversee the study and report back to the legislature by June 1, 1986 with recommendations. Senator Wilma C. Woodard (D-Wake) and Representative Richard Wright (D-Columbus) serve as co-chairs of the legislative committee.

Comparable worth has not yet developed into a hot issue in the gubernational campaign, but Democratic candidate Rufus L. Edmisten and Republican candidate James G. Martin express differing positions in the magazine:

"I support equal pay for equal work and the establishment of an objective job evaluation system to provide internal pay equity for all employees of state government," Edmisten told Insight in an interview on "Where the Candidates Stand."

Martin agrees with the general guidelines established by the legislature for the pay equity study but adds, "The important issue to be stressed is to give appropriate weight to the free market forces of supply and demand and appropriate weight to job values."

Both candidates say that if the study discloses any pay inequities, they are in favor of state appropriations to achieve fairness.

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent nonprofit organization that conducts research on state government programs and important public policy issues. The Center receives funds from the Mary Reynolds Babcock and Z. Smith Reynolds foundations (both in Winston-Salem), 30 corporate contributors, and over 700 individual members. Past research by the Center has examined disparities in local school financing, teacher certification policies, and state budget priorities. The Center also publishes the votes of every legislator on every public bill and compiles effectiveness rankings of the legislators.

For more information, call Ran Coble at (919) 832-2839. Copies of the research on comparable worth are available for \$3.00 from the Center at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, N.C. 27602.