



# South Florida's cost of living crunches hiring efforts in State Attorney's Offices

**The first increase in starting assistant prosecutor pay in three years will only go so far, State Attorneys say.**

Funding for State Attorney salaries escaped Gov. **Ron DeSantis'** veto pen and, for the first time in three years, the Palm Beach County State Attorney hopes to bump up starting salaries from the current \$50,000 a year.

State Attorney **Dave Aronberg** said he's not sure how far a planned \$7,000-a-year salary increase will go toward attracting more applicants, but it's becoming an urgent matter in his office, and in Miami-Dade County's office as well. Aronberg has 18 fewer attorneys than a full staff, missing 15% of a full workforce. In Miami-Dade County, the State Attorney's Office is down nearly 90 attorneys, or about 25% of a full staff.

"Recruitment and retention are becoming serious threats to public safety," Aronberg said. "People want to be prosecutors. They just can't afford it."

The situation reflects the challenge South Florida has in attracting candidates willing to work as Assistant State Attorneys. The same salary levels apply throughout the state even though South Florida not only has **some of the highest rents in the country**, but also the fastest rates of rent increases.

An advertised assistant prosecutor position that once attracted 10 applicants is lucky to garner even one. And that's only the first hurdle, Aronberg said.

"We had a couple of prosecutors who declined our offer of employment after they looked around and found they couldn't find a place to live," Aronberg said.

Final figures for how much attorney salaries will increase won't be finalized until the Governor's Office of Policy and Budget provides the specific dollar allocations, which vary by circuit, according to **Paula McMahon**, the Broward County State Attorney spokeswoman.

Both Miami State Attorney **Katherine Fernandez Rundle** and Aronberg say they hope to increase the starting prosecutor salary (salaries vary by division) by exercising some

budgeting discretion, whatever the final numbers are.


Still, the situation is unsustainable in the long haul, Fernandez Rundle argued.

“Although I am grateful the Legislature recognized the need and provided funding for additional salary dollars for my assistant state attorneys, the reality remains that we still cannot compete with other government agency attorney salaries let alone private firms paying much heftier salaries,” Fernandez Rundle said in a statement. “And given the cost of living in Miami-Dade County, it will not allow us to recruit or retain enough talented attorneys to meet all of our community’s needs.”


In Broward County, they are waiting on final figures to see how much starting pay for assistant prosecutors can be increased. In the meantime, minimum wage employees’ pay is going to increase from \$13 to \$15 hour for support staff, and the whole staff will be getting their first legislative cost-of-living increase since 2020.


Broward County State Attorney **Harold F. Pryor** said he’ll take it. He made several trips to Tallahassee this past Session to make his case. A piece he and Broward County Public Defender **Gordon Weekes co-authored for the Sun Sentinel** found Florida is well below the national average for starting prosecutors (\$66,802) and assistant public defenders (\$61,087), they found.

“We are excited to be able to raise salaries for all of our employees,” he said.



Anne Geggis

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### Anne Geggis

Anne Geggis is a South Florida journalist who began her career in Vermont and has worked at the Sun-Sentinel, the Daytona Beach News-Journal and the Gainesville Sun covering government issues, health and education. She was a member of the Sun-Sentinel team that won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Parkland high school shooting. You can reach her on Twitter @AnneBoca or by emailing [anne@floridapolitics.com](mailto:anne@floridapolitics.com).



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Publisher: Peter Schorsch @PeterSchorschFL

Contributors & reporters: Phil Ammann, Roseanne Dunkelberger, A.G. Gancarski, Anne Geggis, Kelly Hayes, Ryan Nicol, Jacob Ogles, Gray Rohrer, Jesse Scheckner, Christine Sexton, Andrew Wilson, Wes Wolfe, and Mike Wright.

Email: Peterschorsch@floridapolitics.com

Twitter: @PeterSchorschFL

Phone: (727) 642-3162

Address: 204 37th Avenue North #182

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