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# Salary Parity Between Forensic Specialists and Correctional Officers

## Brief background on the Lake's Crossing Center Maximum Security Forensic Facility

Lakes Crossing Center is the only freestanding maximum-security forensic facility in the State of Nevada. It operates under the Department of Human Resources - Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services. Lake's Crossing Center's clientele consists of inmates, committed by a judge, from all 17 counties within the State of Nevada. Lake's Crossing Center's mission is to evaluate or treat these individuals in regards to competency, and then return them to the county of origin to stand trial. Most of these inmates/clients are pre-trial and have charges ranging from trespassing to multiple murders. Often, the jails send us their hard to handle inmates i.e.: Escape Risks, Suicidal or Assaultive towards staff and/or other inmates.

## PARALLEL DUTIES - DIFFERENT PAY - Correctional Officers/Forensic Specialists:

Training: (Both mandated by legislation)  
Category III Peace Officer Academy  
Mental Health/Developmental Services certification (150 hours) College level courses

The Forensic Specialist is a **Category III Peace officer**.

Primary duties are:

Monitoring and supervising client/inmate movement/activities - Performing headcounts and working in a control room - Conducting body/area searches - Admitting and discharging inmates/clients - Transporting inmates/clients to all outside medical appointments (EKG's, MRI's, Dental, X-Rays etc.), on occasion, court commitment hearings and air and ground transports to other secure facilities within and out of the state - Dealing with the maladaptive and aggressive behaviors of the client/inmate, which often includes physical confrontations and restraints/seclusion - Attending Treatment Teams and assisting in developing and implementing treatment plans - One to One, Group and Recreational Therapy involvement.

As you can see, the Forensic Specialist does all of the **same duties** as a Correctional Officer or related detention officer, as well as an additional Mental Health Technician Certification and involvement in treatment issues; however, there is a disparity in pay, which will continue to cause a high turnover rate. This turnover rate is actually expensive, as the cost of training and overtime is very high. With less experienced staff, safety and quality of care is also of concern.

**High Turnover Rate of Forensic Specialist is Very Expensive – Cost of Off-Site and On-Site Training and Overtime to Cover Staff Shortfall**

Forensic Specialist Positions Funded - 38

Forensic Specialist III - 32

Forensic Specialist IV - 6

As of 7-01-02 all Forensic Specialist IV positions (six in total) are filled. There are four vacant positions in the Forensic Specialist III category (approved for 32).

Recent hiring:

2002 – 7

2001 – 9

2000 – 7

**Sixty-Eight percent** of all current Forensic Specialists at Lakes Crossing Center have been employed less than two years. **48%** of all current Forensic Specialists at Lakes Crossing Center have been employed for less than 13 months.

Despite the fact Lake's Crossing Center has been aggressive with recruiting efforts, we have another area of concern, that of **EMPLOYEE RETENTION**. Since 7-15-00, 26 Forensic Specialists have resigned from their position. Most of these employees had indicated they were leaving for higher pay with other law enforcement or related agencies.

**SAME DUTIES – DIFFERENT PAY  
Comparisons (July 1, 2002)**

(These amounts are for Police/Fire Employer Paid retirement)

Forensic Specialist I:	26 step 1 – 23,824.08	Annually	
Correctional Officer Trainee:	29 step 1 - 26,914.32		"
Forensic Specialist II:	28 step 1 - 25,849.44		"
Correctional Officer:	31 step 1 - 29,232.00		"
Forensic Specialist III:	30 step 1 - 28,020.96		"
Sr. Correctional Officer:	32 step 1 - 30,443.04		"
Forensic Specialist IV:	32 step 1 - 30,443.04		"
Correctional Sgt.:	34 step 1 - 33,136.56		"

These amounts are modest compared to other Law Enforcement Agencies. In an audit conducted several years ago, it was found that the "top out" pay for a Forensic Specialist IV, (formally a Supervising Forensic Specialist), was approximately **\$38,000.00**. The same "top out" pay for a Sgt. at the Washoe County Detention Center was approximately **\$58,000.00**. The disparity in pay all the way down the ranks were similar.

In conclusion, based on the above information, we are requesting that the Forensic Specialist class receive pay-grade increases to equal that of the Correctional Officer class. This will assist us in the recruitment and retention of quality employees and ultimately assist in maintaining a secure and safe environment for staff and the community.

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 173-ASSEMBLYMAN ARBERRY  
FEBRUARY 20, 2003

Referred to Committee on Ways and Means

SUMMARY—Increases salaries of certain forensic specialists employed by State. (BDR S-113)

FISCAL NOTE: Effect on Local Government: No.  
Effect on the State: Yes.

EXPLANATION - Matter in *bolded italics* is new; matter between brackets ~~is material to be omitted~~ is material to be omitted.  
Green numbers along left margin indicate location on the printed bill (e.g., 8-15 indicates page 5, line 15).

AN ACT relating to public employees; increasing the salaries of certain forensic specialists employed by the State; and providing other matters properly relating thereto.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. **Section 1.** 1. The Department of Personnel shall increase by two grades the level of compensation on the pay plan for employees in the classified service of the State that is adopted pursuant to NRS 284.175 for each person employed by the Department of Corrections or the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services of the Department of Human Resources at Lakes Crossing Center as a Forensic Specialist I, II, III or IV, effective retroactively to January 1, 2003.
- 2. As used in this section, "grade" means the designation of a salary range for a classification of employees.
- Sec. 2.** This act becomes effective on July 1, 2003.