

Globe Editorial

Automatic raises, sick-day pay: agencies must eliminate perks

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MASSACHUSETTS citizens are rightly outraged when they see quasi-public authorities awarding senior executives automatic raises or bonuses. But that happens at MBTA, the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, and the Brockton Regional Transit Authority.

It's just as galling to see a so-called "quasi" writing departing employees large checks for unused sick time. But that occurs at the MBTA and the Massachusetts Port Authority, where Executive Director Thomas Kinton currently has an astounding 478 accumulated sick days he can cash out.

Such buyouts don't often occur in the private sector, and they shouldn't occur at agencies that the state put under separate authority supposedly to avoid perks and favoritism - but which suffer from large amounts of patronage and unwarranted giveaways.

Now a special commission has taken direct aim at those and other abuses. Authorities should not be offering guaranteed raises or bonuses or buying back big blocks of sick days, declares the Quasi-Public Authority Compensation Review Commission. Nor should senior authority executives have deals that require expensive buyouts upon dismissal. Instead, they should serve "at will" and, if fired, receive severance pay of three to six months salary.

Although the panel, chaired by Stephen P. Crosby, dean of the McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies at UMass-Boston, found that the pay range for authority executives was generally reasonable, it made important recommendations for tightening the pay process. Specifically, the commission said that quasies should have written job descriptions and performance expectations for senior positions; that their boards should establish formal compensation committees, which should meet without the authority's executives present; that compensation levels should be set only after a thorough analysis of comparable positions; and that the value of retirement benefits should be considered when determining compensation packages.

It's regrettable that it takes a special commission to inject some common sense into the Commonwealth, but given that it does, this report is a smart and valuable piece of work.

Secretary of Administration and Finance Leslie Kirwan and Inspector General Gregory Sullivan have sent copies to the various quasies, asking that they adopt the recommendations. That would be a first step toward restoring a measure of faith in agencies that have too often been oblivious to public concerns.■