



**MEMO TO:** County Council Members  
**CC:** Satpal Sidhu, County Executive  
Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive/A.S. Director  
**FROM:** Melissa Keeley, Human Resources Director  
**DATE:** January 30, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** PROTEC17 - Collective Bargaining Agreement 2026-2028

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The County and Union bargaining teams reached a tentative agreement on a three-year successor collective bargaining agreement (CBA) beginning January 1, 2026, which the Union ratified. This union represents environmental health staff in the Health and Community Services Department.

Summary of significant changes:

### **Wages**

With this tentative agreement, the salary matrix has been adjusted to correct prior imbalances and align step increases with other bargaining groups. Step 1 was eliminated, a new Step 9 was created, and all step increases are now evenly distributed at 3.8%. Employees will generally be placed in the new matrix at a step that is no less than their current rate of pay. As a result, most employees will see an average increase of approximately 2.25%. When combined with the 0.5% across-the-board COLA, the total average increase for 2026 will be approximately 2.75%.

By way of background, in 2023 the County and the Union agreed to eliminate “longevity steps” from the salary matrix. These longevity steps provided very small increases (generally \$0.10 or less per hour) and occurred every three years. The 2023 CBA compressed these steps to create a new top wage step, but the remainder of the matrix was not rebalanced, resulting in uneven step increases and, in some cases, employees remaining at the same step for two years without an increase. Countywide, step increases are generally 3.8%. Similar corrections have been made for other bargaining units, and PROTEC17 is the final group to receive this adjustment.

- 2026 – .5% COLA + implementation to new salary matrix, resulting in approx. 2.75% wage increase
- 2027 – 2.5% COLA
- 2028 – 2.5% COLA

### **Medical Coverage Contribution (consistent with other groups)**

- 2026 – the actual premium cost of \$1,621
- 2027 – the actual premium cost up to \$1,751
- 2028 – in the absence of successor agreement, up to \$1,891

### **On-Call Weekly Rotation Premium**

Health and Community Services is mandated to provide a 24/7 phone reporting line for certain things, such as notifiable diseases and other situations, to protect public health by ensuring immediate reporting of urgent situations. The new contract contains a provision to compensate these employees \$20 per day when assigned to be on-call.

Should you have any questions, I am available by email at [mkeeley@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:mkeeley@co.whatcom.wa.us) or at extension 5305.