

State Board Agrees with State Scientists: Bargaining with Newsom at Impasse

Despite nearly 1,300 days in talks, the governor hasn't offered a solution to close pay gaps of 30% or more

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*Jacqueline Tkac, CAPS
Bargaining Team Chair*

labor authority has agreed with the California Association of Professional Scientists (CAPS) that, after nearly 1,300 days of bargaining, further negotiations between the union and Gov. Gavin Newsom would be futile without the assistance of an appointed mediator.

The Public Employee Relations Board (PERB), which administers the laws governing California state-employee unions and management, [made the declaration today](#) in response to [CAPS' Sept. 19 request](#) for an impasse determination that would move the talks into mediation.

The Department of Human Resources (CalHR, the Newsom Administration's bargaining arm) [said it "does not believe the parties are at an impasse"](#) and accused CAPS of bargaining in bad faith. However, CalHR admitted to seeing "merit in mediation to assist the parties in reaching an agreement" despite opposing CAPS' request for an impasse declaration.

CAPS Bargaining Chair Jacqueline Tkac said, "It's disappointing to see CalHR say we're acting in bad faith when all we have ever wanted is to reach an agreement that appropriately values our state scientists and ensure the governor's important climate-change, consumer protection, and public health initiatives keep moving forward. We've been patient. We've worked hard. Now it's time to take advantage of this additional, legal, commonly used tool to break the logjam. If there's ever been a better example of impasse than talking for 1,288 days without reaching a deal, I don't know what it could be.”

CAPS and CalHR started bargaining four months before the union's last contract expired in July 2020. CAPS has sought an agreement that values state scientists, whose wages have lagged compared to those of their managers and supervisors by 30% or more for a decade. A similar salary gap has existed for nearly 20 years between state scientists and state engineers and with comparable federal and local scientists.

News outlets have highlighted Newsom's inadequate position on salaries.

A recent Politico report noted the governor's "offers have been far short of the union's demands, coming in at around 2 percent per year plus some special pay bumps of 2 percent to 5 percent per year for certain classifications." The Sacramento Bee's editorial board two weeks ago challenged Newsom to offer a real solution to the state scientists' inequitable salaries: "No legislature or governor can claim to care much about combating climate change when they make the scientists charged with preserving our natural resources such perennial losers in the negotiations game."

The PERB decision requires CAPS and CalHR to enter mediation. There is no time limit for those discussions.

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ABOUT CAPS

CAPS represents roughly 4,300 rank-and-file state scientists whose working conditions are collectively bargained and 1,300 supervisory and managerial state scientists whose working conditions are subject to a meet-and-confer process with the state. All work in more than 30 state departments in 81 scientific classifications. CAPS members protect Californians from life-threatening diseases; safeguard our wildlife and abundant natural resources; and defend our food supply, air, and water against toxic waste and pollution. Follow on X.com and Instagram: @capsscscientists.

Jon Ortiz

California Association of Professional Scientists

+1 916-761-8267

[email us here](#)

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