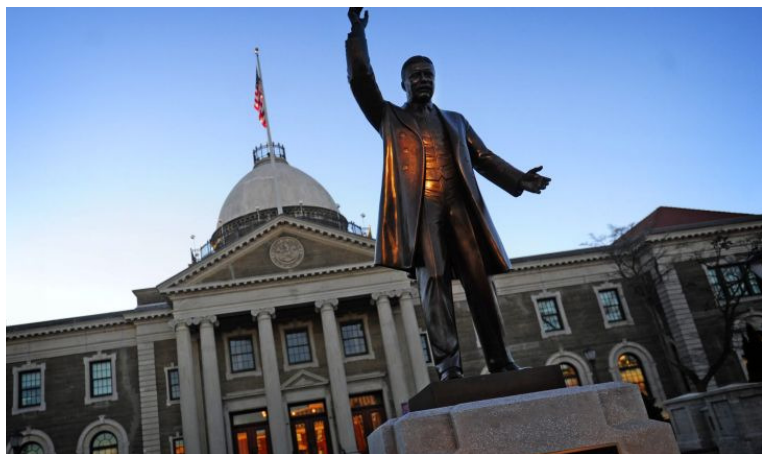


LONG ISLAND / NASSAU

Departing Nassau officials got \$2.5 million in payouts after Laura Curran win

County law enabled former officials in the administration of County Executive Edward Mangano to collect for unused sick and vacation time.



The exterior of the Theodore Roosevelt Executive & Legislative Building in Mineola, at sunset on November 20, 2013. Photo Credit: Newsday/Thomas A. Ferrara

By Scott Eidler

scott.eidler@newsday.com

Updated August 11, 2018 6:00 AM

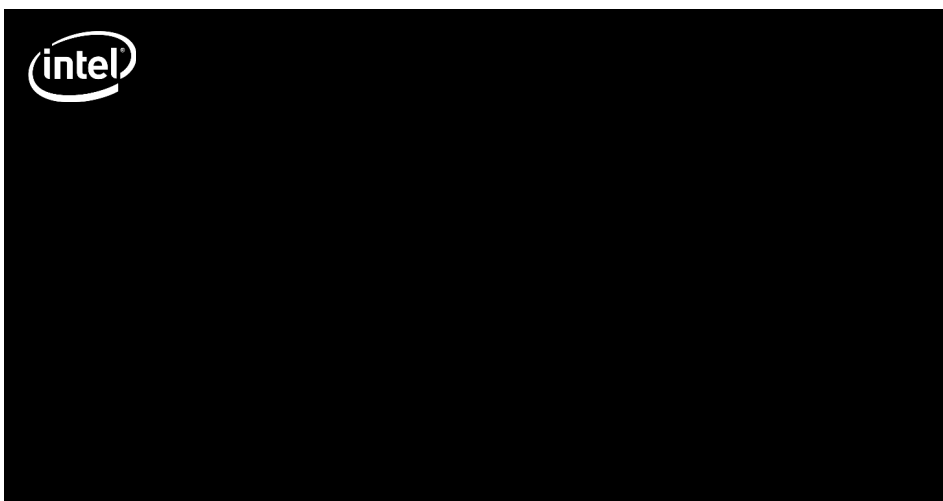
Nassau County has paid more than \$2.5 million in unused vacation and sick time to 75 political appointees who left county government after Democrat Laura Curran was elected as county executive in November following the eight-year administration of Republican Edward Mangano.

Large termination payouts long have strained the county's finances, with much of the spending going to retiring police officers under the terms of union contracts.

Nassau's finances remain fragile, with \$81 million in risks in this year's \$3 billion budget, according to the Nassau Interim Finance Authority, the county's financial control board. The county ended 2017 with a \$122.4 million deficit in its three primary operating funds.

Curran's election prompted the latest round of payouts to management employees for leftover sick and vacation time, which employees are entitled to under county law.

ADVERTISING



The top payouts went to:

- Former Deputy County Executive Edward Ward, a Mangano spokesman, who received \$195,648. His annual salary was \$180,090.
- The former county sheriff, Michael Sposato, who received \$181,555. His salary was \$180,689
- Former Deputy County Attorney Elizabeth Loconsolo, Sposato's wife, who received \$154,701. Her salary was \$155,000.
- Charles Ribando, a former deputy county executive for public safety, who was paid \$145,173. His salary was \$152,662.
- Rob Walker, an ex-chief deputy county executive who is facing a federal corruption trial in January, who received \$139,644. His salary was \$186,673.

Nassau County taxpayers footed \$2,510,777 in termination payments to 75 full-time employees, according to records obtained under a Freedom of Information Law request.

Get the Breaking News newsletter!

Get the latest breaking news as it happens.

The political turnover also has affected the Nassau Health Care Corp., a public benefit corporation whose \$202 million in debt is guaranteed by Nassau.

[Sign up](#)

By clicking Sign up, you agree to our [privacy policy](#).

Nine employees received severance packages that totaled more than \$562,000 after Curran appointed George Tsunis, a prominent developer and fundraiser, to run the corporation in February, according to

records obtained under FOIL.

NHCC, also known as NuHealth, relies on state and federal funding and insurance payments and operates facilities that include Nassau University Medical Center in East Meadow.



Nassau County Executive-elect Laura Curran speaks outside the Theodore Roosevelt County Executive Building in Mineola on Nov. 8. Photo Credit: Howard Schnapp

The last change in county administrations occurred in 2010, when Mangano succeeded Democratic County Executive Thomas Suozzi, who served two terms.

"There's a big turnover, a big changeover politically in the county," said Jerry Laricchiuta, president of Nassau's Civil Service Employees Association, the county's largest public union. "Democrats are now starting to get in big positions, and Republicans are

leaving. It's cyclical."

Experts say that political transitions can strain government budgets.

"There's a general problem that these liabilities tend to be unfunded," said Gerald Benjamin, a political scientist at SUNY New Paltz. "Local governments don't budget for [payments] . . . and the cost gets to be very substantial if there's a partisan turnover, and especially if the party that's leaving power has been in power for a while because there's been time for those liabilities to accrue."

Others argue that allowing government employees to stockpile sick and vacation can boost efficiency and discourage them from leaving for private sector jobs.

"It's a productivity trade-off that's made with eyes wide open," said Lee Adler, a lecturer on public sector employment law at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Employees who know they can cash out their sick and vacation days when they leave may "not use sick leave as liberally as you might during each year," Adler said. They may decide not to supplement their "vacation by adding a couple days of sick leave when a holiday comes in the middle of a week," he said.

Ribando, who left the Mangano administration in December and previously served as chief of investigations for former Nassau District Attorney Kathleen Rice, said he never took a sick day during his 11-year tenure in both offices.

"I didn't make the rules, and you can't expect me to be punished for . . . coming to work every day rather than taking advantage of sick and vacation time," Ribando said in an interview. "I was just a workaholic. So I came to work every day, and the next thing I know, I'm leaving the county and I have all these extra days I didn't even know about."

Loconsolo said in an interview, "I worked like crazy, and whatever the county and the laws provided that I could get that I didn't use, I got."

She added that, "the reason why I have unused time is because I had a lot of work to accomplish, which I did."

The 75 exempt full-time employees who left represent nearly 30 percent of the 262 full- and part-time nonunion employees who were working at the end of the Magano administration. Curran since has hired 95 new exempt employees.

Those who left in many cases were longtime county employees who held top jobs in the Mangano administration. Seven ex-administration officials left with more than \$100,000.

Walker, 43, a former Republican state assemblyman from Hicksville, served through Mangano's two terms in office as his chief deputy county executive.

Walker, whose mother is Nassau County Legis. Rose Walker (R-Hicksville), was indicted in February on federal charges of obstruction of justice and lying to the FBI in connection with taking \$5,000 from a county contractor. Prosecutors said he returned the money as part of an attempted cover-up. Walker has pleaded not guilty. His trial is scheduled to start Jan. 7.

Walker declined to comment, but noted his payout in January occurred before his arrest.

Ward and Sposato could not be reached for comment.

At NuHealth, former chief executive and president Victor Politi received seven months' severance totaling \$214,893 and an additional two months' pay of \$63,433 that officials said they were contractually obligated to pay. The board terminated him for cause in April, without identifying a reason, but approved a severance package for him in May, records show.

Six of those employees also received a total of \$298,000 for unused sick and vacation time, the records show.

John Ciampoli, a former counsel to the NHCC board of directors and a prominent Republican elections lawyer, was paid six months' severance of \$79,693 after his Feb. 20 departure, and more than \$26,000 for unused sick and vacation time.

Dr. Laurie Ward, vice president of ambulatory services at NUMC, was paid \$247,500, including more than \$203,000 for unused sick and vacation time.

Ciampoli declined to comment, and Laurie Ward could not be reached.

Ronald J. Rosenberg, a Garden City-based attorney for Politi, called Politi's dismissal politically motivated.

"Dr. Politi views his time at the medical center as one of the most meaningful chapters in his career and he is proud of the many things he accomplished which improved it. His dismissal was undeserved and solely due to partisan politics," Rosenberg said.

Tsunis described the severance payouts as a "one-time hit" with long-term benefits for hospital operations. "No one wants to pay severance, but you pay it once, and then they're off your payroll," Tsunis said. The agreements, which include promises not to sue the health system, also will prevent costly legal battles, Tsunis said.

Ribando, of Farmingdale, now a law enforcement consultant, said he not only deserved his payout, but county policy also allowed him to donate 118 unused days he could not be paid for to county employees who were on long-term sick leave.

He added: "If you have an employee like myself, let's just say, who comes to work every single day and never takes off, I mean that's got to be more advantageous to a taxpayer than somebody who's using chronic sick all the time."

But Laricchiuta said it's tough for many in the county's rank-and-file to see executives leave government

with six-figure payouts. He noted that thousands of CSEA members endured a three-year wage freeze imposed in 2011 by the Nassau Interim Finance Authority.

“Regardless of the politics . . . it’s very hard for any of the union leaders and their members to be OK with large payouts when every member has lost tens of thousands of dollars due to a wage freeze during a financial crisis,” Laricchiuta said.

TERMINATION PAY POLICIES

Nonunion employees in Nassau County can be paid for up to 75 accrued vacation days and 175 sick days upon termination if they were hired after Aug. 15, 2014, according to a county ordinance and the comptroller's office. Nonunion employees hired before that date can be paid for up to 90 vacation days and 200 sick days upon termination.

In New York State, most annual salaried state employees in the executive branch are entitled to a cash payment for up to 30 days of accrued and unused vacation time when they leave state employment, a spokesman for the State Civil Service Department said. There is no cash payment for unused sick leave, the spokesman said.

In Suffolk County, exempt employees who retire or resign can be paid for up to 90 days of vacation time, a county spokeswoman said. Payout for sick time for retiring employees is capped at 180 days; exempt employees who resign cannot be paid for unused sick time.

By Scott Eidler

scott.eidler@newsday.com