



Wisconsin State and Local Government Employment Levels

April 20, 2011

Wisconsin continues its trend of having fewer state and local employees per capita than the national average, according to numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau. The number of state and local employees per capita in Wisconsin stayed about the same from 2008 to 2009, and remained well below the national average.

About the Data

This analysis relies on:

- Revised figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau in January 2011 on government employees and payroll at the state and local level in 2009, based on a March 2009 survey; and
- Figures calculated by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau on state and local government expenditures for salaries.

WI Still Has Fewer Government Employees Per Capita than National Average

Wisconsin has long had fewer state and local government employees than the national average, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, and that trend continued in 2009. State and local government

employees include workers in a wide variety of functions, including those working as teachers, highway workers, corrections guards, firefighters, and police officers.

When the number of full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) was measured relative to each state's 2009 population, Wisconsin was 7.9 percent below the national average and ranked 43rd, meaning only seven states had a leaner public sector. Table 1 shows how Wisconsin compares to the national average on several measures.

Wisconsin is also lower than the national average in payroll spending for government employees. The per capita spending for the March 2009 payroll for all state and local employees in Wisconsin was 8.8 percent below average, and ranked 30th. The payroll per FTE was 0.9% percent below the national average, although Wisconsin was above the median on that measure, ranking 18th nationally.

Looking specifically at the number of state employees, Wisconsin also ranks 43rd nationally, and 13.0 percent below the national average.

Wisconsin delegates much more of the responsibility for human service programs to local government

Table 1: Government Employees and Payroll in Wisconsin
March 2009

	Nat'l Average	WI	Difference	WI Ranking
Total state and local employees (FTEs) per 1,000 residents	54.7	50.4	-7.9%	43 rd
State employees only	14.3	12.5	-13.0%	43 rd
Local employees only	40.4	37.9	-6.1%	32 nd
Total payroll (March) per state resident	\$228	\$208	-8.8%	30 th
Total March payroll per FTE	\$4,171	\$4,113	-0.9%	18 th

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. District of Columbia excluded from rankings.

entities than the vast majority of states. Yet despite the fact that Wisconsin counties have more responsibilities than their counterparts in most other states, our state is 6.1 percent below average in local government employees relative to state population and ranks 32nd on that measure.

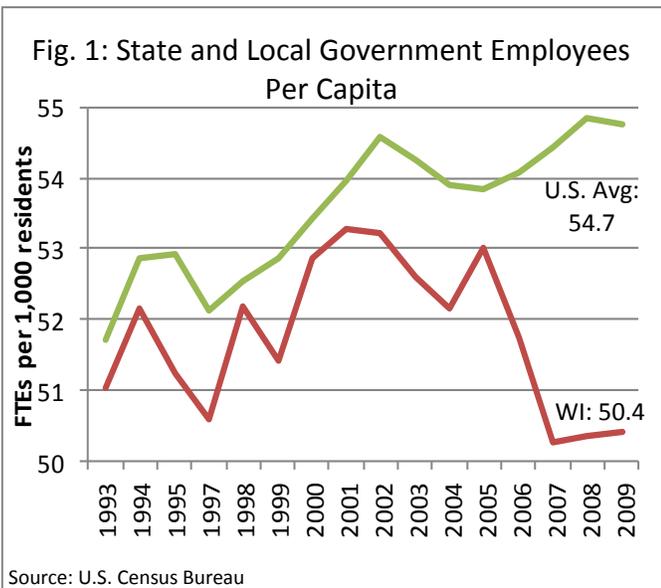
The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance has noted that Wisconsin has more units of government than most other states, measured relative to state population or geographic area. Based on that fact, one might infer that our state has more public employees, particularly at the local level, but that is not the case.

Trends in Public Sector Employment

Viewed as a long-term trend, the gap between Wisconsin state and local employees per capita and the national average is widening. In 1993, Wisconsin had 0.7 fewer public sector FTEs per capita than the national average. By 2009, that gap had grown and Wisconsin was 4.4 FTEs below the national average.

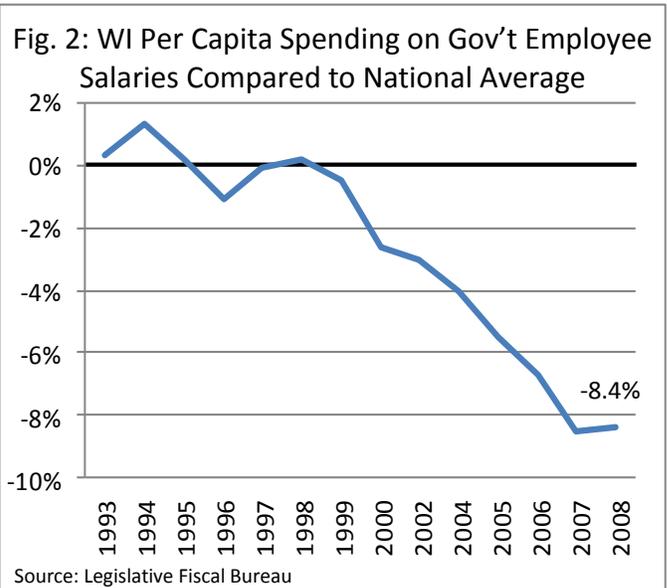
When viewed year by year, the number of government employees per capita in Wisconsin has fluctuated, although always remaining lower than the national average. As shown in Figure 1, Wisconsin public sector employment reached a low of 50.3 FTEs per capita in 2007 and 2008, increasing only slightly to 50.4 FTEs per capita in 2009.

Just as Wisconsin has considerably fewer public employees per capita than the national average, our



spending on salaries and wages is lower than the national average when measured on a per capita basis.

Per capita spending on state and local salaries in Wisconsin has been below the national average since 1998, as shown in Figure 2. Since then, per capita state spending on public employee salaries in Wisconsin has steadily dropped compared to the national average. Wisconsin currently spends 8.4 percent less per state resident on public employee salaries than the national average. Wisconsin ranked 30th among the states in per capita spending public sector employees in 2008, compared to 18th in 1993.



Conclusion

Census Bureau data from 2009 show that Wisconsin continues a decade-long trend of having fewer state and local government employees per capita than the national average, ranking 43rd nationally. Wisconsin was 8.8 percent below average on its total per capita payroll for public employees and ranked 30th on that measure.

Federal fiscal relief assisted both state and local governments in avoiding significant layoffs. It remains to be seen how the number of state and local government employees will be affected by the end of this relief.

Jon Peacock, Research Director
Tamarine Cornelius, Research Analyst