

## Sheriff adjusts step pay plan, looks to overhaul program

By Catherine Dominguez, cdominguez@hcnonline.com    Published 9:22 pm, Sunday, April 15, 2018

Photo: Jason Fochtman, Staff Photographer



Montgomery County Sheriff Rand Henderson speaks during the Montgomery County Commissioners Court meeting Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2017, in Conroe.

Less than a year after Montgomery County commissioners approved a change in the county's step pay program to allow salary increases for county peace officers based on their anniversary date, Sheriff Rand Henderson is working to give the program another overhaul.

Commissioners gave Henderson and Human Resources Director Dodi Shaw the green light to move forward with a search for an outside firm to revise the program. "I fully support the step plan, I just think we can do better," Henderson told commissioners last week, adding that he wants to make sure the county is competitive with salaries. "I think we are slipping, slipping pretty bad." Henderson said he would bring back cost and recommendations on the firm during budget hearings.

On Tuesday, commissioners approved Henderson removing all exempt, commissioned personnel from the plan and adjusting salaries for all commissioned personnel based on Texas Commission on Law Enforcement active-duty years of services.

According to Henderson, the adjustment affects eight lieutenants in his department. "We recently did a study to look at the role lieutenants play, whether they are managers, whether they should be exempt or non-exempt," Henderson told the court. "Through that process, they were reclassified as exempt."

Employees who work in non-exempt positions keep records of the specific times they work so they are paid overtime when they work more than 40 hours in a workweek. Employees in exempt positions do not receive overtime pay no matter how many hours they work in a workweek.

The adjustment, Henderson said, totaled about \$115,000, which he said he had in his budget.

County officials said the change should apply to all five constable offices as well. However, Assistant County Attorney Amy Dunham said there is currently no funding source for that action. She suggested the court address that issue during budget hearings later this year.

The county originally adopted a step pay system in 2008 and revised it in 2013. Originally, the pay system guaranteed incremental pay hikes for every four years of service. Increases were capped at 16 years. However, in 2013, the plan former Sheriff Tommy Gage championed didn't succeed in retaining deputies. That year, the court revised the pay schedule from four years to two years in order to keep Montgomery County law enforcement agencies competitive with other agencies and help retain more deputies.