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**Higher Education’s Golden Retirement**

**A public university president's parting payout of nearly $270,000 is raising a lot of questions in Massachusetts.**

BY [CHARLES CHIEPPO](http://www.governing.com/authors/Charles-Chieppo.html) | MARCH 17, 2016

As we watch a presidential campaign that serves as a cautionary tale for what can happen when people grow sufficiently disillusioned with government, a story out of Massachusetts provides a reminder of why so many voters feel that way.

When Bridgewater State University President Dana Mohler-Faria retired last year after 39 years in state service, he did so with a $183,421 annual pension. But that wasn't what really caught people's attention. It turns out he also received a cash payout of $269,824 for unused sick and vacation time.

When most Massachusetts state employees retire, they can receive payment for up to twice their annual allotment of vacation days and for 20 percent of their accrued sick days. But those rules -- generous as they might seem to private-sector workers, few of whom can cash out unused sick and vacation time -- don't apply to state public higher education officials who aren't covered under a collective-bargaining agreement. They are entitled to the full value of up to 64 days of unused vacation time, about twice what most state employees get. And unlike other state workers, they can roll any additional unused vacation time into the sick-leave bank, 20 percent of which they can collect in a lump sum.

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Mohler-Faria, who earned $285,600 in his final year at Bridgewater State and is now paid $100,000 annually as a senior adviser to the university, was eligible to take a total of 61 paid days off in each of the last 15 years. In addition to holidays, they included 15 annual sick days and 30 vacation days. If he took all the time available to him, his schedule would have worked out to an average work week of 3.8 days. As president, Mohler-Faria signed off on his own sick time and vacation schedule.

During his first 10 years at Bridgewater State, Mohler-Faria did use an annual average of 21 sick and vacation days. But over his final six years, he didn't take a single sick day. And although he used just nine vacation days during that period, from 2012 to 2015 alone he took 29 foreign and domestic trips on Bridgewater State's dime, including at least four to his ancestral home of Cape Verde and two to Belize.

While Mohler-Faria's was the biggest payout, during the last five years three other state higher education officials received cash-outs of more than $200,000 upon retirement. In the wake of the news about Mohler-Faria's payout, Gov. Charlie Baker is [reviewing public higher education pay policies](https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/03/11/retirement-package-and-continuing-pay-for-former-bridgewater-state-president-spark-call-for-investigation/Ez00igqUT6tDfF1JaFSJgL/story.html).

Let's hope that sunlight proves to be the best disinfectant in this case. Many state governments have moved to curb perks like the ones Mohler-Faria received for most of their retirees.

But whether its higher education or certain quasi-public authorities, there are still too many corners of the public sector that play by different rules. Until the practice of maintaining places where the well-connected can go to reap a windfall is ended, look for the voter revolt to continue.

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