

Longtime Scott Walker aide Archer lands new state job with big raise

By Jason Stein
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Madison — The state's public defender passed over two finalists to award a plum state position to a longtime former aide to Gov. Scott Walker, setting the official's salary at \$113,000 a year, or 31% more than her predecessor in the same information technology job.

Cindy Archer hadn't applied for the civil service job and she was not among the two finalists put forward to state Public Defender Kelli Thompson by a hiring committee. Archer will receive a hefty increase over the \$101,121 a year that she had been making in her previous job with the public defender's office and over the \$86,278 salary of her predecessor.

Archer was in the spotlight in 2011, when her [home was raided](#) by law enforcement as part of a controversial secret probe into former Walker aides while he was Milwaukee County executive. She was not charged, however.

State Senate Minority Leader Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee) said that the pay increase for Archer comes at a time when state workers have had to pay more for their benefits and pensions and seen raises of 1% a year.

"The best way to get a job in this state is to be personal friends with Scott Walker," Larson said. "It just goes along with the unfortunate cronyism we've seen out of the governor's office."

A spokesman for the public defender's office — an independent agency — rejected that claim, saying the governor's office played no role in awarding Archer the job and the accompanying raise.

"The agency made this decision independently, and solely based on the business needs of the agency," Randy Kraft said.

Kraft said that Thompson and her deputy, Michael Tobin, rejected the two finalists from outside their office for the IT job after deciding they wanted someone who knew the systems in their office.

"Although the state public defender and deputy state public defender were impressed with the qualifications of both (of the finalist) candidates, the final decision recognized the importance of Cindy's hands-on knowledge and experience with the agency's aging technology," Kraft said.

Archer started this week in the new job as chief information officer for the public defender's office. The office is managed by its own board and is not under Walker's direct control, though the governor does appoint the board's members, who are then confirmed by the state Senate.

The job given to Archer is a civil service position, which means that under state law it is supposed to be awarded based on merit without any political considerations.

A hiring panel interviewed seven candidates for the job and chose two candidates from outside the defender's office as finalists, Achung Ho and Linda Johnson, Kraft said. The hiring panel consisted of Jennifer Bias, the affirmative action officer and deputy trial division director in the defender's office, Catherine Dorl, the trial division director, and Diane Kohn, a retired state chief information officer.

But instead of either of the finalists, Thompson and Tobin chose Archer.

"Cindy had not applied for the position. However, when approached by the state public defender to consider taking the position on a permanent basis, she ultimately agreed to take on the responsibilities," Kraft said.

The previous chief information officer at the office, Gail Zaucha, had been in the job since 2003. But her experience in the job didn't translate into higher pay because the agency had limited ability to increase her salary after she was hired, Kraft said.

Now Archer is benefiting from a raise aimed at making the pay for the chief information officer position more attractive to candidates in the labor market, he said.

Archer, who did not respond to messages seeking comment, has had a varied career of nearly three decades in public service, but hasn't spent much of that working directly in information technology.

She was Walker's administrative services director in Milwaukee County when Walker was county executive, and after he became governor she was chosen for the No. 2 position in the state Department of Administration. Since then, she has held a series of jobs in the Department of Children and Families and the public defender's office.

Those top administrative jobs included oversight of county and state computer systems and workers. Archer had been serving as the public defender's acting information manager and in that capacity had written the agency's IT plan for next year and analyzed the agency's IT capacity needs, Kraft said.

The Wisconsin State Journal [first reported](#) on Archer's transfer.

The reasons for the September 2011 raid on Archer's Madison home have never been fully disclosed. The prosecutors themselves have drawn criticism from conservatives and a [federal lawsuit](#) for a pair of secret John Doe investigations into Walker associates, the governor's campaign and other conservative allies.

In May, a federal judge halted the latest John Doe probe, saying he believed it violated the free speech rights of conservatives.

Patrick Marley of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.

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