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SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

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Two MSU leaders offered contracts through mid-2027

Claudette Riley
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK - MISSOURI

Two of the highest-ranking members of the president's staff at Missouri State University have been offered longer employment contracts — aimed at keeping them on campus another 3½ years, at least.

MSU President Clif Smart, who is set to retire next summer, recently offered executive vice president Zora Mulligan and general counsel Rachael Dockery appointments through mid-2027.



Mulligan and Dockery, who is also vice president of legal affairs and compliance, have formally accepted. The pacts will go the university's Board of Governors this week for final approval. Both leaders have law degrees.



In a Nov. 14 letter, included in the meeting agenda, Smart asked Mulligan to stay on through her initial three-year employment term — which ends July 4, 2025 — plus a two-year extension, to keep her on campus until July 4, 2027.

The executive vice president is the No. 2 officer at the university and reports directly to the president.

In the role, she oversees multiple units and operations including enrollment management services and

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Council considers payments for firefighters with cancer



Springfield firefighters work to put out a house fire near Missouri State University in this April 2017 file photo. NATHAN PAPES/NEWS-LEADER

Marta Mieze
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK - MISSOURI

Springfield is joining a statewide pool to provide benefits to local firefighters diagnosed with certain cancers.

At its Monday night meeting, Springfield City Council initiated the process to join the Missouri Fire Fighters Critical Illness Trust and Pool for 2024.

The trust was created by the state in 2022 after passage of Senate Bill 45 in 2021, which provided \$5 million in financial assistance to help fire service agencies in the state address the burdens created by serious health issues. Due to the nature of their jobs,

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Springfield firefighters battling a house fire at a vacant home on South Robberson Avenue in January 2020. ANDREW JANSEN/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

QPS site continues to expand with lab, pharmacy

Susan Szuch
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK - MISSOURI

If you've ever used Mucinex or Allegra, you've got QPS Missouri to thank.

For the past 30 years, QPS has run clinical trials in the Springfield area, providing a source of income for participants and data for pharmaceutical companies. Recently, it's expanded its services to include a clinical laboratory and a larger pharmacy.

Since its inception in 1994, the company has conducted about 2,500 trials and has paid volunteers more than \$50 million. Expansion is just another fact of life for QPS Missouri, which started off as Bio-Kinetic before it was bought by Delaware-based QPS.

"We started with 12 beds here on the north side of our campus; now we have two facilities with over 60,000 square feet and 240 beds," said Brendon Bourg, vice president of QPS Missouri and son of founder Dale Bourg.



As a contract research organization, QPS Missouri is different from other companies in the area that conduct clinical trials.

"There's lots of people that complete clinical studies, but they're just one piece of the pie," Bourg said. "We do the whole thing: We write the protocols we submit to the FDA, we recruit all the subjects, write all the reports, do all the analysis. We can do everything within QPS."

The clinical laboratory will be a huge boon to the company — not only does it mean QPS Missouri has shorter wait times for lab results, it also means that they can work as a central laboratory for other, smaller companies.

"We needed our safety labs (to be) quicker; we needed them in real time," Bourg said. "So when a subject has an adverse event or we need to draw some

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QPS Missouri has recently expanded, adding a clinical laboratory and a larger pharmacy. PHOTO COURTESY OF QPS MISSOURI

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Council

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firefighters face increased risk of 17 types of cancer. Through the pool, eligible firefighters diagnosed with one of these will receive coverage and monetary benefits.

What's covered and who's eligible?

The program covers three cancers — breast, testicular and thyroid — that are usually excluded from workers' compensation presumption programs. According to the MFFCIP, the program streamlines claims so that payments can begin 10 days after a diagnosis is submitted and confirmed. Upon confir-



Springfield Firefighters battle a house fire on North Howard Avenue on June 27. NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

mation of eligibility, no investigation of the cause is required, unlike many traditional workers' compensation claims.

City documents state that those eligible to be enrolled include paid employees of the city assigned to at least five years of firefighting hazardous duty, who were last assigned to such hazardous duty within the previous 15 years and who are under 70 years of age. The city will enroll in the program at the \$300,000 benefit level, the highest available. This is the maximum amount that can be paid to an individual for a diagnosis.

The program is neither disability nor medical coverage. Rather, it is accident coverage in the form of a nontaxable cash award based on the diagnosis and the anticipated out-of-pocket expense, with the actual amount determined by the type and stage of cancer. Smoking or use of tobacco reduces the award by 25%.

In order to officially partake in the program, council will vote on four separate bills that also include union agreements, including coverage of eligible aircraft rescue firefighter personnel. As the program runs on a calendar year, there is urgency for council to approve the agreements by the end of the year. The bills received a first reading Monday, but since that was the last formal council meeting before 2024, a final vote will take place during a special council meeting the afternoon of Tuesday, Dec. 19.

Any terms of future participation during consecutive years in the program will be part of the collective bargaining process with each union.

Marta Mieze covers local government at the News-Leader. Contact her with tips at mmieze@news-leader.com.

Contracts

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student success.

Mulligan helps identify and execute the annual action plan, lead work on the strategic plan addressing enrollment and retention efforts, assist with planning professional development events and retreats, and lead the university's state and federal advocacy efforts.

The former commissioner of higher education for Missouri is also responsible for managing budgets for the parts

of the work she oversees.

Mulligan will receive an annual salary of \$252,000 plus a housing allowance. It was \$2,000 a month for the first 12 months of employment and will be \$3,000 a month for the next two years. No housing allowance was noted after she completes her third year.

She receives health coverage, retirement benefits, vacation and sick time, and other fringe benefits extended to full-time employees.

In the offer letter, Smart wrote: "I can honestly think of no one better suited for the role of executive vice president."

In a similar letter, Smart asked Dock-

ery to stay on as university general counsel — a role he held before becoming the MSU president — and vice president of legal affairs and compliance through June 30, 2027.

"I look forward to your continued work for the university," Smart wrote.

In the role, Dockery provides legal advice and consultation to the university's president, Board of Governors, and the administration and faculty. She also represents the university's interests in different venues.

She is responsible for overseeing the university's compliance with "all applicable legal and regulatory obligations."

The former prosecutor was assistant general counsel at CoxHealth before joining the university in 2014.

Dockery was offered an annual salary of \$225,000 plus a range of benefits and will be eligible to receive the same raise approved for staff each year.

The News-Leader reached out to Mulligan and Dockery. Neither wanted to comment prior to the board vote this week. The MSU Board of Governors will meet Thursday at the Plaster Student Union.

Claudette Riley covers education for the News-Leader. Email tips and story ideas to criley@news-leader.com.

QPS

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labs on them, we literally draw them here, walk them over to our lab, they run the samples and within maybe 30 minutes we have the results."

Construction of the new pharmacy added much-needed room as well as a full clean room for compounding pharmaceuticals for clients, mostly in studies where it's the first time a drug is being tested in humans.

What is a clinical trial? What kinds of clinical trials does QPS Missouri perform?

Clinical trials are part of the process a medication

goes through to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. These trials are used to determine whether a treatment is safe and effective. There are four phases, each of which helps researchers answer different questions. QPS Missouri mainly conducts Phase 1 trials, which means they are looking at the safety of the drug, not whether it works to treat the condition it's meant for. In some cases, it might be the first time a drug is tested in humans.

For these trials, QPS Missouri needs healthy volunteers, who are compensated for the time they're at QPS and how much they're confined. Typically, volunteers are paid a \$350 to \$500 stipend for a one-day stay. The length and type of studies vary greatly.

"It could be a complete outpatient vaccine study, an RSV or flu or COVID, or it could be all the way up to a long-term 60-day confinement study, like an obesity study where they're taking obesity medication," Bourg

said. "We do many different kinds of studies; there's not one that is really the same as the other. They're all a little different."

On average, each volunteer completes about two-and-a-half studies, according to Bourg. However, there are outliers at both ends of the spectrum, including people who have completed 40 to 50 studies. It can depend on a person's motivation.

"People that only do one is because they just needed a little bit (of income) to get them by, but the people that do two or three is because it's something that's interesting and kind of fun, and you get to meet new people," Bourg said.

Plus, "The food is great."

Susan Szuch reports on health and food for the Springfield News-Leader. Follow her on X, formerly known as Twitter, at @szuchsm. Story idea? Email her at sszuch@gannett.com.

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