



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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The Honorable Ned Lamont
Office of Governor Ned Lamont
State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Governor Lamont:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members, we thank you for the launching of the CT Health Horizons program. This program is an exciting initiative that brings together all of the state's universities offering master degree programs in social work. This alone is a positive first for our state. CT Health Horizons will effectively expand the graduation numbers of MSWs in our state at a time when there is a dramatic need for more social workers in all sectors of behavioral health employment.

The actions of the CT Legislature in funding the CT Health Horizons program addresses half of the social work workforce concerns facing Connecticut. That is the pipeline for new social work practitioners. Its emphasis on diversity and affordability of graduate education will lead to an even more diverse social work workforce that will meet the needs of our state's diverse population (I note here that social work is already the most racially diverse of the behavioral health professions). What is not addressed however is how we support and maintain the current social work workforce. To have a significant net gain in the number of social workers we must do far more to keep our current workforce. Otherwise, we will only be replacing experienced social workers with newly graduated social workers. To this point I respectfully offer the following recommendations, some of which your administration may implement immediately, and others that your office can advance in the 2023 legislative session.

- Increase compensation across all employment sectors, with an emphasis on non-profits. MSW programs typically cost \$30,000-\$70,000 and starting salaries can be as low as mid-forties. State funding for improved salaries is a must.
- Lower the social work licensure application and renew fee. CT has, by far, the highest fees in the nation. CT is also one of only six states that renew social work

licenses annually. A two-year license is the standard used by the vast majority of states. Fee reductions make a positive statement as to the value placed on social workers.

- MSW students must have internship supervision by an MSW. Increasing the number of students will require far more supervisors. Few, if any MSW supervisors are compensated by their employer for taking on supervisory responsibilities, nor have a reduction in their workload. Finding enough MSW supervisors will be a real problem and a lack of support for them will exasperate this issue.
- Employers are increasingly offering sign-on bonuses, leading sometimes to new employees earning salaries comparable to or greater than existing employees. Employers must be encouraged to offer “stay-on” bonuses, both for equity and encouragement to remain in present employment.
- CT public schools allow students up to two excused absences for mental health days. CT employers should be encouraged to offer the same for behavioral health workers. The National Association of Social Workers has added this benefit that allows employees to use up to two sick days as mental health days.
- DMHAS currently lacks an appropriate job classification for Licensed Master Social Workers (LMSWs). I am aware that DMHAS is in conversation with DAS on creation of a LMSW job specification. I strongly urge you to seek expeditious action by DAS that will allow DMHAS to effectively recruit LMSWs.

It has been reported that nationally, up to 35% of social workers are leaving the field due to retirement or burn-out. Social workers are essential workers, serving in the trenches of mental health care during a pandemic. We have seen unprecedented needs for social work services at the same time that social workers face their own pandemic stressors. Action is critically needed to provide for concrete supports to maintain the current social work workforce, while at the same time expanding the social work workforce through the CT Health Horizons program.

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter has been in communication with Ben Stang, Director of Healthcare Workforce Strategy. We appreciate his collaborative approach, and offer to your administration our further assistance and involvement as we all work toward meeting the behavioral health needs of our state's residents.

Sincerely,

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

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Executive Director

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