



Social Work Investment Initiative

Social Work Licensure

The National Association of Social Workers New York City Chapter recognizes the importance of having a well trained work force in the not-for-profit and public human service sectors.

People in need of services, including the homeless, victims of domestic violence, children and at-risk families, immigrants and refugees, people who are currently or formerly incarcerated, as well as people in need of behavioral health programs, have multiple, complex needs, including trauma.

In order to provide quality services that address the unique needs of each individual, assessments and interventions need to be appropriately and effectively implemented. Ideally, maintaining a well prepared, well educated and trained human services work force requires licensed social workers in critical positions where there is direct contact with clients. However, NASW-NYC recognizes there are numerous systems not sufficiently staffed as a result of inadequate financial resources and inability to fully implement the 2002 social work licensure statute.

In an effort to address this inequity among systems and to enhance the capacity of human service programs to have professional social work staff, we are proposing the Social Work Investment Initiative.

The Initiative is a multi-faceted approach and includes:

Implementation of the states 2002 social work Licensure Law.

- In 2002, after at least 28 years of negotiation between the legislature, stakeholder provider groups and trade associations, the practice of social work became one of the state's licensed professions. In doing so, a minimum standard of education, experience and exam requirements was established to assure that individuals providing mental health services, specifically, the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness were qualified to do so. Just prior to the passage of such legislation, several state agencies noted they would need time to move their workforce into compliance. As such, a temporary exemption from licensure (of 6 years beyond the delayed effective date, of 2004) was included in the law for individuals in the employ of programs and services regulated, operated, funded or approved by the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the former Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities now the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and local mental hygiene or social service districts. The list of "exempt agencies" was subsequently amended to add the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Department of Health

(DOH), the State Office for the Aging (SOFA) and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS).

- Three additional extensions have been passed since the agencies reported they were unable to meet the dates for compliance, the last one passing in the 2015-16 budget giving the agencies until July 1, 2018 to meet the licensing requirements passed in 2002.

An investment into the profession and support to implementing agencies:

- \$4 million Loan Forgiveness Program for Social Workers specifically working in a currently exempt setting in an effort to mitigate the reportedly high rates of staff turnover in exempt agencies. Such an initiative would not supplant the current loan forgiveness program available to a broader array of social workers.
- \$18 million incentive program for currently exempt agencies to increase the number of licensed social workers available to provide supervision. This will provide for a stronger career track and also reduce reported staff turnover. Based on the Executive's budget estimation that the cost of full compliance with the social work licensing law would be \$360 million we have estimated that to hire a sufficient number of licensed supervisors in key service sectors that the Governor's office has identified would be 5% of this amount, or \$18 m. The cost was arrived at by assuming supervisors comprise 10% of the staff reflected in the total amount. It was further assumed that only 50% of the supervisors would needed to be replaced by licensed staff.
- \$500,000 for the development and distribution of culturally sensitive and ESL test preparation to assist those who are vulnerable to, or have already, failed the exam.
- \$250,000 for the development and implementation of a workforce data collection survey to be utilized (upon mandate) by the NY State Education Department at registration and re-registration of all Article 154 licensees (Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Licensed Master Social Workers). This will assist us in better understanding where licensees are currently working and where gaps persist.