



February 17, 2022

To: The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Cathy Senderling-McDonald, Executive Director, CWDA
Tiffany Whiten, Senior Government Relations Advocate, SEIU California
Rebecca Gonzales, Director of Legislative Affairs, NASW
Laura S. Abrams, PhD, Chair and Professor of Social Work, CADD

RE: **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: BUILD CAPACITY FOR MASTERS OF
SOCIAL WORK**

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), the Service Employees International Union State Council (SEIU), National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter (NASW-CA) and the California Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work (CADD) jointly request your support to increase the number, and diversity of, of master's level social workers (MSW) in California to serve vulnerable populations, including abused and neglected children served by county child welfare and older adults served by adult protective service (APS) programs. While we appreciate the Governor's proposed and expansive investment to increase social workers statewide, our organizations urge a focused approach to increase the number of social workers from graduate programs to support best outcomes and to meet federal and state mandates.

Demand for master'-level social workers has increased

MSW-level social workers are critical staff for delivering services across many diverse sectors and programs that impact virtually every Californian. MSW-level staff are especially critical in serving individuals and families impacted by poverty, abuse and neglect and behavioral health needs. This Includes many publicly funded

programs including in child welfare, foster care, APS, mental health, education, hospitals and school-based settings. MSW social workers also oversee and guide the work of many para-professional staff in team-based approaches. In the child welfare program, state regulations require at least 50 percent of emergency response and family maintenance social workers to possess a master's degree in social work or its equivalent, and 100 percent of supervisors to have a master's degree in social work or its equivalent (MPP 31-070). Public and private adoption agencies are required to utilize master's level social work staff (MPP 89152 & 89155). Unfortunately, many counties as well as the private, non-profit agencies that provide direct care for foster children are reporting high turnover and double-digit staff vacancy rates, which jeopardizes high quality services to this vulnerable population.

Recent Investments into housing and homelessness, behavioral health, education and the child welfare and APS systems have increased demand for MSW-trained social work staff across public agencies and community-based service providers. This includes the recent expansion in the APS program to serve older adults over age 60, in alignment with California's Master Plan on Aging (AB 135, Statutes of 2021).

Statewide challenges in recruiting and retaining master's level social workers

Despite the increasing demand for MSW-level professionals, as well as the level interest in attending social work education programs within California, there are simply too few social workers coming through the education system, and an insufficient number of MSWs graduating each year. This is occurring primarily because the state's Schools of Social Work do not have the capacity to add additional cohorts of students. Many programs do not have the capacity to meet even the existing demand for social work degree opportunities. As just one example, for the past eight years, California State University, Long Beach, has received on average 1,200 applications to its MSW program, but it can only accommodate 250 students. Prospective students who are unable to access graduate programs may choose other professions, or may pursue education through private universities but incur far higher student debt as a result.

Because of the limited number of MSW degrees being offered across the state, there is fierce competition across governmental and non-governmental agencies for MSWs. Additionally, the pipeline does not have the capacity to continuously engage and sustain students who represent marginalized communities, such as individuals of color and those living with disabilities. California's population continues to become more diverse, and the populations served by health and human service agencies are disproportionately represented by people of color. Consumers of our services continuously express a desire to be served by social workers who reflect the populations served. Additionally, public agencies serve diverse populations with a very high level of need, which makes retention an additional challenge.

Focused Attention Needed to Promote Social Workers with Master's Level Degrees

Our Coalition appreciates the Administration's attention to workforce needs and the specific attention to increasing social workers statewide. As we understand, the Administration has engaged with the California public universities to increase the number of students who enroll in STEM, social work and education and early education disciplines by 25 percent by 2026-27.

The Governor's Budget also proposes \$296.5 million (\$270.5 million GF and \$26 million Opioid Settlement fund) in 2022-23, increasing to \$370.5 million in 202-23 and 2024-25, to support increases in workforce capacity, through the California Department of Health Care Access and Innovation (HCAI). A portion of this workforce investment includes a proposed \$210 million to increase the number of social workers by providing support for 250 loan repayments, 620 stipends, and 5 training program grants, according to HCAI. This is in addition to the existing FY 2021-22 investment of \$49.6 million (and \$21.5 million for 2022-23) to expand training capacity for psychiatrists and social workers. Additionally, HCAI reports it is in process of conducting research into the social work landscape, specialties, and education requirements in partnership with industry experts to inform the design of its new training program.

While these proposed investments are commendable for their attention to workforce capacity needs, it is not clear if these proposals provide an immediate and direct pathway to increasing the total number of MSW-level social workers in California. In response, our coalition requests that the proposal include the following:

- A set aside of funding to the public schools of social work to enable those schools to immediately enroll additional students into MSW programs. We recommend an initial funding level of \$30 million per year, for two years (\$60 million total), to the schools of social work. At an approximate cost of \$25,000 per student per year, this would result in a net increase of 1,200 graduates.
- Establish a taskforce overseen by the Secretary of California's Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) and representatives of the Chancellors of the UC and CSU Systems to develop and implement recommendations for expanding MSW-level capacity in California's CSU and UC systems, potentially in collaboration with HCAI. Appropriate \$1 million for the work of the taskforce.
- Increase supports to county agencies and community-based non-profit organizations to provide field internships which support the required 900 hours field-practicum for all MSW students.
- Support MSW students from under-represented communities through educational stipends. We propose \$13 million which is estimated to support approximately 500 students (depending on the level of support provided and university costs).
- Require CalHHS to commission a follow up study to the SB 2030 (Chapter 785, Statutes of 1998) child welfare workload study given the significant new mandates that have been enacted in recent years. Cost for this study is \$1 million.

Over a two-year period, the above proposal would invest \$118 million SGF to increase the number of master's level social workers in California.

As the Administration and Legislature consider workforce-related investments to support vulnerable populations, we encourage a focus on increasing the number of MSW-level graduates to address the pipeline issues, with a focus towards building diversity in the workforce.

cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
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