

March 11, 2021

Re: Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services in support of amendments to HB110 to increase funding for workforce support programs for social workers

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and the rest of the members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of two amendments filed by Representative West to increase funding to workforce support programs for social workers. We are in full support of these amendments as investments into strengthening the workforce of social work is desperately needed. Ohio is home to more than 27,000 licensed social workers, providing the vast majority of behavioral health, child welfare, and other healthcare functions. Social workers must have a minimum of a bachelor degree, but most hold a master degree. The high educational requirements for the profession, coupled with often low starting salaries, has led to workforce shortage. A 2020 study by the Council of Social Work Education and the national NASW found that the mean debt of master level social workers in the country is \$66,000. The toll of educational debt is far worse when analyzing race- the mean debt for Black MSWs was \$92,000 and \$79,000 for Hispanic MSWs. The mean starting salary for MSWs across the country (which is slightly higher than the usual salaries offered in Ohio) is \$47,000.

The amendments for additional funds for the following two programs is an important start to addressing this workforce crisis, which in turn affects the quality of services received by Ohioans.

Substance Use Disorder Loan Repayment Program: Representative West has submitted an amendment to add \$1 million to both years of the biennium to increase the state allocation to the program administered through the Ohio Department of Health. The program currently receives \$500,000 per year to draw down matching funds from HRSA to provide loan repayment of up to \$50,000 for a range of professionals providing services to address substance use disorder. The additional money would provide more professionals with loan repayment as currently the program has only been able to accept a fraction of applicants. The additional \$2 million allocation of Ohio general revenue would be matched with federal dollars to substantially increase the program's reach.



Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative: The second amendment would increase the allocation to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative by \$5 million per fiscal year. The program provides certified community behavioral health centers with money to address workforce needs including training, supervision, loan repayment, and tuition assistance. These agencies employ many new social workers who are most burdened by debt and low starting salaries as they transition into the field.

Ohio needs social workers more than ever as we grapple with the impact of the last year on our collective physical and mental health. Schools of Social Work are graduating growing numbers of new professionals with the energy and insight to help, but with low starting salaries, high debt load and additional emotional toll of the work, they are at risk of leaving the workforce soon after entering. An investment in the critical social work workforce is an investment in Ohio's wellbeing.

Thank you for your consideration of these amendments We regret that we were unavailable to testify in person on these amendments due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but are very available to respond to questions by phone or email

Sincerely,

Danielle Smith, LSW

Executive Director

National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter

dsmith.naswoh@socialworkers.org

614-461-4484

Reference:

Council of Social Work Education & National Association of Social Workers. (2020, August). *The Social Work Profession: Findings from Three Years of Surveys of New Social Workers*.

<https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/Workforce-Study/The-Social-Work-Profession-Findings-from-Three-Years-of-Surveys-of-New-Social-Workers-Dec-2020.pdf>

