

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
WEST VIRGINIA CHAPTER
2007 Legislative Action Position Statements**

**SOCIAL WORK SALARIES, PAY EQUITY, STAFFING,
REIMBURSEMENT FOR SERVICES**

Social Workers have an extremely important role in our state in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable children and families. NASW supports high standards for social workers, and strongly supports WV's social work professional license regulations and rules... To attract and retain quality individuals to the social work profession, we must see that professional social workers are compensated fairly. NASW has been a strong supporter of pay equity legislation that directly impacts social work salaries by establishing pay equity for certain state jobs. This has a similar effect on private agencies that hire social workers. The State, particularly the Department of Health and Human Resources, contracts with many social work agencies. The state cannot allocate funding for staff to these contractual agencies at a higher salary rate than what the state employee earns. By raising the bar for salaries for state social workers, social workers in the private sector will also benefit. NASW has long advocated for higher salaries for all social workers, but can only have a direct impact on salaries in the public sector. Experience shows us that the state sets the stage, and the private sector follows.

During the past year, Child Protective Services has been receiving a lot of attention from the media and from the Legislature. NASW has pointed out systemic problems in child welfare and child protective services and how social workers are severely under-paid and have caseloads that are so high it puts children at risk. We have discussed our concerns with Governor Manchin. The Governor allocated \$3.3 million for Child Protective Services workers during the 2005 Legislative Session to address staffing and retention. This resulted in a 15% raise for trainees, and a 20% increase for CPS workers and supervisors. According to DHHR Secretary Martha Walker, The Dept. also is implementing a "hiring and retention bonus" of \$1000 for new employees in counties that have over a 20% vacancy rate and have shown that have tried all recruitment techniques but have been unsuccessful. We are very supportive of these measures that we feel will help address the CPS problems of recruitment, retention, and unmanageable caseloads.

However, low salaries and high caseloads are not just an issue for Child Protective Services Social Workers. This is an issue for social workers across the board, in both the public and private sector. Those who work with elderly, people with disabilities, children and families at risk etc.

Our success in meeting the needs of vulnerable families and children in part is dependant upon the ability of WV to attract and retain social workers who have graduated from accredited programs and who are licensed by the state. DHHR has made positive strides in this endeavor through collaboration with the five accredited public social work programs and utilizing monies available under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program is key to developing and retaining a trained, degreed, and highly competent staff to meet the goals of child safety, permanency and child well being. The social work programs provide match so that the state can draw down federal monies through Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program. By using the match of the five schools, education and training of future social workers and existing social workers can be done using minimal state monies. The ability to appropriately draw down federal money is limited only by the ability to match the federal money.

NASW has been very active in securing higher salaries for state social workers through the Equal Pay Commission. This commission was established in 1998 and is continued until July 1, 2010. The Commission is to study both the methodology and funding for the implementation of a gender discrimination prohibition, which includes an analysis of state job descriptions which measure the inherent skill, effort, responsibility and working condition of various job classifications. The commission reviews similar efforts to eliminate gender-based wage differentials implemented by other governmental entities in this and other states.

Commission consultants found that several female dominated job classifications, particularly social workers within DHHR, were underpaid in comparison to positions with similar workloads across state government. It will take \$5 to \$7 Million to equalize pay across all of these job classifications. The WV Legislature has appropriated \$700,000 over the last 6 years to begin the process of correcting the pay disparity. With matching federal funds, about \$1.5 million has been allocated to raise the salaries of social workers and other job classifications that were found by the Commission to be severely underpaid. NASW makes the following recommendations to maintain and strengthen standards for social workers in recruiting and retaining the best-qualified workers to meet the needs of the individuals and families of WV:

- Support continued implementation to fully fund pay equity so that social workers and other female-dominated professions will receive "equal pay for equal work". The state can continue to draw down federal match dollars for these positions.
- Development of innovative strategies by DHHR & private employers to recruit and retain employees who have earned the BSW and/or MSW degrees.
- Allocation of state matching funds and other strategies to maximize the draw down of federal Title IV-E Child Welfare training dollars.
- Phasing out the DHHR exemption allowing hiring temporary licensees.
- Offering competitive salaries, benefits, and improved working conditions for all social workers as well as expanding educational incentives so that such address student loan forgiveness and/or reimbursement.
- Recognizing LICSW (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers) as reimbursable under Medicaid

Continued

The Child Welfare/Juvenile Justice system in West Virginia is in need of change. Adequate funding, inter-agency collaboration, accountability, and service development are needed in order to keep children and families safe and healthy. NASW support Child Welfare/Juvenile Justice interventions that offer an improved balance between the best interests of the child and the rights of the family. NASW recommends the following:

Funding:

- Increase general revenue support for Children's Services.
- Redirect funding for out-of-state care toward developing services; the funding should follow the child.
- Invest in low-end, community-based services and prevention programs.

Collaboration:

- Implement and enforce the use of consistent protocols within Multidisciplinary Investigative and Treatment teams to ensure coordinated services and the best outcomes for kids and families.
- Coordination among DHHR, DJS, Education, and the provider community

Accountability:

- National accreditation for private Child Welfare organizations.
- Establish an oversight process to ensure that West Virginia's statutes are being followed.
- All services need to have measurable and proven outcomes.
- Strong enforcement of the caseload standards set forth by the Commissioner of Welfare (§9-2-6a)

Service Development:

- Services should be developed based on the needs of the child, not the funding source.
- Develop more prevention/early intervention programs, such as birth to three, truancy diversion, in-home family education programs, etc., to keep children and youth with their families or if out of home placement is warranted, in the least restrictive environments.
- Continue to expand foster family care in West Virginia, with an emphasis on recruiting homes that will take teens, sibling groups, and children with behavioral issues.
- Develop services to address the needs of youth aging out of the Foster Care system

Balance:

- Establish a continuum of care within the Child Welfare/Juvenile Justice system, which includes community interventions and least-restrictive out-of-home placements, as determined by risk assessment

MEDICAID REFORM IN WEST VIRGINIA

Medicaid is attracting much attention in the political arena at the Federal and States levels, with the primary interest being on controlling its costs. While the effective and efficient expenditure of public funds is always a matter for legitimate oversight, this effort to cut back on one of the most important programs in the social safety net, especially at the federal level, while advocating significant new tax cuts is fiscally, morally, and ethically inappropriate. Eliminating further tax cuts, which do not appear to add to economic growth-the reason most often cited for doing them-will leave in place funding that could be used to support the re-building of areas recently damaged by natural disaster and allow for maintaining an effective vehicle for bringing health care access to many of our low-income citizens.

In West Virginia alone, over 350, 000 citizens utilize the Medicaid program and its services. Given the current economic climate in West Virginia, Medicaid remains an important program that allows low-come families to have some of their health needs met, especially for their children, while gaining access to work opportunity, admittedly at rather low wages. With the full implementation of welfare reform, many of the most vulnerable families have not been able to secure work and those that do are often employed in low wage jobs lacking benefits. In this climate, Medicaid becomes an important resource that supports parents in partially meeting the needs of their families given the limited economic opportunities often available to them.

While program costs are a legitimate concern for most any activity, NASW, both at the National level and in West Virginia, believes that our first priority should be to design a health care delivery system that is both universal and comprehensive in its approach to the needs of our citizens. Universal health care appears to the one area of the social welfare system that the United States has never embraced, unlike every other major industrialized nation. While the current political climate appears to be one in which our leaders are routinely reducing the role of the federal government in social welfare, we believe that should be resisted at all levels as inconsistent with a free society that needs to have in place policies and programs that provide its citizens with real economic opportunity and support.

Given the demographic and economic realities of West Virginia, we are the oldest state as well as a state with one of the lowest medical family incomes in our nation, we encourage our governmental leaders to seek ways to protect Medicaid for our most needy citizens, as well as ways to expand it to support those employed in low wage jobs often without health care benefits. Toward these ends we recommend the following:

- Before finalizing the Medicaid waiver, the state should pursue an open input process designed to get feedback from the public, providers
- The state should resist establishing a federal cost cap that might place West Virginia at significant financial risk in meeting future need given the state's demographics.
- That client costs (co-pays, etc) be established on a sliding scale and that those at the federal poverty standard not be required to make more than a token payment to participate in the program.
- Where behavioral incentives for clients are included that they be designed to reward desirable behavior and not presented to punish program use.
- Whatever reforms may be sought should recognize the need to cover all low-income children consistent with current income guidelines as the starting point.
- That program expansion to the working poor be a policy priority.