

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 49

Requesting the Department of Health Professions to study the need for additional micro-level, mezzo-level, and macro-level social workers and increased compensation of such social workers in the Commonwealth. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, January 29, 2020
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 3, 2020

WHEREAS, social workers form society's social safety net and offer important services to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and the governmental agencies and political subdivisions of the Commonwealth, guided by special knowledge of social resources and systems, human capabilities, and the part that conscious and unconscious motivations play in determining human behavior; and

WHEREAS, social workers are trained to provide service and action to effect changes in human behavior, emotional responses, and social conditions by the application of the values, principles, methods, and procedures of the profession of social work; and

WHEREAS, social workers have demanding positions that entail increasing levels of required paperwork, large caseloads, and consistent difficulties with challenging clients, including increased safety risks; and

WHEREAS, salaries of social workers are, on average, among the lowest of all occupations in the United States, especially among social workers with a master's degree; and

WHEREAS, workforce challenges facing the social work profession include high student loan debt, lack of fair market compensation, translation of social work research to practice, social worker safety, a lack of state-level licensure policies and reciprocity agreements for social workers providing services across state lines and via telehealth, and a lack of diversity, all of which affect recruitment and retention of social workers and lower the level of services provided to clients; and

WHEREAS, in order to continue the successful growth and development of citizens of the Commonwealth through the practice of social work, it is essential that efforts be taken to ensure that an adequate number of social workers are available to provide services and that social workers are compensated in a manner that both rewards their work and encourages a long-term workforce; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Department of Health Professions be requested to study the need for additional micro-level, mezzo-level, and macro-level social workers and increased compensation of such social workers in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its study, the Department of Health Professions shall convene a work group, which shall include representatives of the Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, institutions of higher education with social work programs, the Department of Social Services, and local departments of social services. The work group shall (i) identify the number of social workers needed in the Commonwealth to adequately serve the population; (ii) identify opportunities for the Commonwealth's social work workforce to successfully serve and respond to increasing biopsychosocial needs of individuals, groups, and communities in areas related to aging, child welfare, social services, military and veterans affairs, criminal justice, juvenile justice, corrections, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and other health and social determinants; (iii) gather information about current social workers in the Commonwealth related to level of education, school of social work attended, level of licensure, job title and classification, years of experience, gender, employer, and compensation; (iv) analyze the impact of compensation levels on social workers' job satisfaction and performance, as well as its impact on the likelihood of other persons entering the profession and any complications to such compensation levels caused by student debt; and (v) make recommendations for additional sources of funding to adequately compensate social workers and increase the number of social workers in the Commonwealth. The Department of Health Professions shall enter into data sharing agreements with the Department of Social Services and other employers of social workers to enable the exchange of de-identified data necessary to comply with the directives set forth in this paragraph.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Health Professions for this study, upon request.

The Department of Health Professions shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2020, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2021 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.