



POLITICAL POST ~ Wednesday, April 1, 2015

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As the clock ticks toward the April 1 deadline, final negotiations on budget bills are being hammered out, bills are being printed, and we capital dwellers are sousing out the devils and the details. As the budget relates to the profession and our identified priorities, there is news to report on a number of fronts.

Expansion of the Social Work Loan Forgiveness Program – Last year we were successful in securing a 25% increase in the funds appropriated for the social work loan forgiveness program, as well as a geographic expansion to all counties throughout the state (some in their entirety and some only specific to identified high need areas). We are very happy to report that this year we were successful in annualizing last year's increase AND securing an additional \$250,000 which will bring the total loan forgiveness kitty to nearly \$1.5 million.

Veterans Mental Health Training Initiative (VMHTI) – This year's budget will include a re-appropriation of \$150,000 for the NASW-NYS VMHTI. We expect the funding will be released shortly and as such expect to rollout programming throughout the state.

Problem Gambling Training Project – Policy Staff has pioneered an initiative which will span the course of the several budget cycles to create an unprecedented partnership between the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NYS), the New York Mental Health Counselors Association, the New York Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis, (NAAP) the New York Council on Problem Gambling and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services to develop a comprehensive, multi-discipline, multi-year training curriculum rooted in best practices for the purposes of readying our state's mental health workforce and casino workforce for a predicted uptick in problem gambling. Fiscal details of the project are still coalescing; however we look forward to having the resources to offer members the opportunity to participate in yet another continuing education curriculum that is highly relevant given the recent legalization of casino gaming in NY. Stay tuned for exciting details.

Juvenile Justice Reform – NASW-NYS recently signed on to support an initiative to raise the age of criminal responsibility and reform the juvenile justice system. In January, the Governor, a supporter of such a concept, accepted, in full, a comprehensive set of 38 recommendations offered by his Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice to raise the age of criminal responsibility and provide for the supports necessary for such reforms. In a signal that clearly iterated his commitment to the issue, the Governor then included many of the recommendations and the necessary supportive funding to implement such reforms in his executive budget proposal. Provisions included, but were not limited to, raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18, discontinuing the practice of incarcerating 16 and 17 year old youth in adult prisons, removing those 16 and 17 year old youth currently incarcerated in adult facilities, providing for the expansion of diversion options, creating a special Youth Part in criminal courts for serious offenses, diverting misdemeanor and non violent felony cases to Family Court, expanding rehabilitative and re-entry services, and expanding categories of cases available for adjustment. After much negotiation, tense at times, the legislature and Governor suggested that the issue was simply too comprehensive a change to include in the context of dead-lined budget machinations and as a result the conversations would be punted to the non-budget legislative session (to begin in mid April). However, the supportive funding (\$25 million for services and \$110 in capital investment – bricks and mortar) was left intact. This will allow for the implementation of Raise the Age and its many service components should the legislature and the governor reaches an agreement by the end of session (in June).

Non Budget Updates

Limited Liability Partnerships – We have, for a number of years, worked in collaboration with the New York State Society for Clinical Social Workers to advance legislation to allow licensed mental health professions to form limited liability corporations. While the bill did not advance last session, we have been continuing to meet with legislative stakeholders to rework our strategy, communicate with other stakeholders and broaden our approach to include work with a coalition of many Title VIII licensed professions to draft language which would authorize the formation of a corporation in which a licensed social worker and a physician could be joint owners – an exemption to the existing prohibition against a physician forming a corporation or partnership with any other licensed professional.

Workers Compensation Program – Efforts continue, in partnership with New York State Society for Clinical Social Workers, to advance legislation that seeks to add Licensed Clinical Social Workers to the list of qualified mental health care providers authorized to deliver mental health services under the state's Workers Compensation program. Unfortunately, while we were successful in passing the bill through both houses, the Governor vetoed the bill in late December along with two other similar bills citing no philosophical opposition to the concept, but instead, in opposition of piece meal solutions to the myriad of issues plaguing the provision of services through workers compensation. The Governor pointed to the fact that the WC Board is currently examining the entire system with the charge to offer holistic recommendations. We have met with the Governors staff, the legislature and the workers comp board, all of whom assure us of no opposition to the concept, but instead the timing. However, it was suggested we slightly alter our bill language to make it more consistent with providers already authorized to provide workers comp services. We are currently re-drafting the bill and expect introduction soon. If passed by the legislature once again, we will be prepared to move forward when the Board has completed its recommendations.

Out of Network – NASW Policy staff (again in partnership with the clinical society) has continued to advocate for out of network benefits through legislative and state agency venues. As such we most recently met with Department of Financial Services (FKA the NYS Insurance Department) to discuss our collective member concerns. While they did share that the goal is to move providers into networks, they noted that some companies do in fact offer out of network benefits, however, that is an employer choice, limited, and viewed as cost prohibitive. We also discussed the need to assure network adequacy and reported that a number of providers believe panels to be stocked with out of date provider lists. Follow up on both issues is planned. Further, NASW-NYS and the Clinical Society are joining efforts with New York State Psychological Association and the New York State Psychiatric Association to stand as a unified voice of mental health professionals. As such, we will be developing a plan of legislative action on this important issue. Stay tuned.

Collective bargaining – Policy Staff are attempting to secure inclusion of the social work profession in a bill that would allow private practitioners to collectively bargain. The Medical Society is the author of such bill and as such, they are considering our inclusion.