

National Association of Social Workers – New York State and New York City Chapter

FY 2025-26 Legislative Position Paper

THE NEW YORK STATE AND NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (NASW-NYS) SUPPORTS A BUDGET BILL TO ADDRESS INEQUITIES IN SOCIAL WORK SALARIES.

Bill Sponsors: TBD

Background:

Salaries within the social work profession have been an issue since the professions' inception. In May 2022, at the request of Senator Persaud, the National Association of Social Workers, New York State Chapter (NASW-NYS) created a survey to examine the prevalence of social worker salary inequities in New York State. Universally, social workers across all demographics assert that salaries are low and not comparable to the work and skill set required to serve clients and program users. One of the core issues of low salaries for master-level social workers is grounded in compensation for the scope of practice. As the skill level of social workers increase, our research has shown that salaries stay stagnant. Furthermore, there are stark differences in salaries when comparing White social workers and social workers of Color. On average, social workers of Color are paid less and have higher student loan debt. In the 2022 Social Work Salary Analysis Report, conducted by NASW-NYS, it was found that within individuals in the higher earning range of \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year, 16.3% identified as white, 6% identified as people of color, and 3.8% identified as Hispanic. Additionally, findings from three years of surveys of new Social Workers, a report released by the Council of Social Work Education, revealed that the average total debt for all higher education was \$92,000 for Black or African Americans and \$79,000 for Hispanics, compared to only \$45,000 for whites (Salsberg et al., 2020).

All New York State social workers must be equitably compensated for the work and services they provide. Less than 10% of respondents in the NASW-NYS study reported receiving a yearly merit increase; and an even smaller percentage of social workers reported receiving a one-time merit raise or promotion. If social workers do not receive salary upgrades, there is a potential that they will leave the profession for a more equitable field. To recruit and retain talented social workers, salaries must be comparable to the training, licensure, and job responsibilities of each position. In the words of New York State social workers:

“Our profession is one that is here to help people, regardless of what is going on in the world, and we do this knowing that the pay is not comparable to the time, energy, and commitment we put into our work.”

“Everyone deserves to have access to a ‘livable’ wage; We, social workers, need to advocate for ourselves so that we can be an advocate for others.”

The Honorable Governor Kathy Hochul’s 2024 State of the State address highlighted the severity of the public safety crisis in New York State due to serious mental health issues and stressed the importance of a plan to remedy this crisis. “For decades, our mental health system was deprioritized and defunded. Make no mistake: this is the defining challenge of our time,” Governor Hochul said. Since the proposal of the Governor’s \$1 billion plan in 2023, the mental health initiative of the State has begun to build early intervention and youth programs; expand access to clinics and housing; and provide employment incentives for mental healthcare workers. The services that social workers provide are incredibly essential to support this effort and deserve equitable pay to be able to perform their jobs to their best ability. Equitable pay for social workers will also lead to improved retainment in the profession, which will ensure vital services are continually provided to communities in which the profession serves.

#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

1. *Ensure equitable base salaries.* Based on the above overview, salaries and compensation have been remarkably lower for social workers than other professions with similar scopes of practice. It is important for the New York State Government to recognize that social workers notwithstanding salary inequities have continued providing mental health services in these extraordinary times. This includes social workers at all levels, including Master of Social Work (MSW), Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW), and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW).

2. *Address racial inequities in salaries.* Social workers of color are burdened with higher amounts of student loan debt, and lower base salary pay when compared to white social workers in New York State. Due to the stagnation of cost of living and salary increases, social workers of color who have, historically, had a higher student loan debt status, may find themselves having to obtain supplemental income to meet their requisite cost of living expenses or choose to leave the profession. It is essential that New York State champions racial pay equity.

3. *Invest in the recruitment and retaining of New York State social workers.* A strong and stable social worker workforce benefits New York State communities exhibiting mental health disparities. Furthermore, concomitant with the above, this legislative priority includes a request to invest in undergraduate and graduate programs that are the vehicle for expanding a social worker workforce.

#### Legislative Request(s):

· NASW-NYS/NYC requests the introduction and passage of a budget bill for services and expenses to provide funding for a 5.4 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for the purpose

of increasing salaries for individuals in social worker positions, in the FY 2025-26 Budget for the period April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026.