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## 2021-2022 Legislative Agenda

The Providers' Council discussed legislative priorities with its statewide human service membership prior to the start of the session in January 2021. Our legislative agenda is based on feedback and input from our members, our Public Policy Committee, Executive Committee and Board of Directors. The Council's priorities for the legislative session are as follows:

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### ***An act relative to fair pay for comparable work***

**House Bill filed by Rep. Kay Khan (House Bill 237)**

**Senate Bill filed by Sen. Cindy Friedman (Senate Bill 105)**

***Last action: Bills reported favorably; referred to Ways & Means (February 2022)***

Similar job titles and roles exist for individuals employed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and those employed at private, community-based human services nonprofits, but the rate of pay is often drastically different – sometimes by up to 30 percent. Due to this disparity, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified workers in the community-based human services sector.

This bill would set a schedule to eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those employed by private, community-based human services nonprofits who are doing similar work under state contracts, providing care and services to residents on behalf of the Commonwealth. It would also authorize reports from the administration on the current pay disparity between workers and new strategies to recruit and retain human services workers at community-based nonprofits.

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### ***An act establishing an education loan repayment program for human services workers***

**House Bill filed by Reps. Jeffrey Roy, Smitty Pignatelli (House Bill 266)**

**Senate Bill filed by Sen. Eric Lesser (Senate Bill 120)**

***Last action: Bills reported favorably; referred to Ways & Means (February 2022)***

Many human services workers' salaries start at just between \$14 and \$15 an hour – just slightly more than minimum wage. The lack of affordable higher education for human services workers and the burden of student debt greatly contribute to the sector's recruitment and retention difficulties. More than 75 percent of human services workers attended some college or have a degree.

This bill would create an education loan repayment program for human service workers. To be eligible, workers must be working at least 35 hours per week, have an individual income of less than \$50,000 per year and have maintained 12 consecutive months of employment in the sector. The program would allow workers to receive up to \$150/month for a period not to exceed 48 months to repay a qualified education loan that was used to attend an institution of higher learning.

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**For more information:**

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## ***An act relative to fair pay for comparable work***

**Bill purpose:** To eliminate the pay disparity that exists between the salaries of human services workers employed by community-based human service providers and state employees holding similar job titles who perform similar work.

**Recent action:** H. 237 (Rep. Khan) and S. 105 (Sen. Friedman) reported favorably in February 2022. Both bills referred to House and Senate committees on Ways & Means.

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### **Key Facts:**

- Similar job titles and roles exist for individuals employed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and those employed at private, community-based human services nonprofits, but the rate of pay is often drastically different – sometimes by up to 30 percent.
- The Commonwealth is the largest purchaser of human services from community-based human services nonprofits.
- The model budgets often created by the Commonwealth for human services programs contain salaries that are far lower than what the state pays for similar positions.
- Due to this salary disparity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for community-based organizations to recruit/retain qualified workers in the sector, which has nearly 180,000 jobs.
- Without a solution to the workforce crisis, an increasing number of jobs will go unfilled and programs may close, leading to a loss of services for vulnerable Massachusetts residents.

### **If passed, this legislation would:**

- Set a schedule to fully eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those employed by community-based human services nonprofits who are doing similar work.
  - Eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those at community-based human services nonprofits no later than July 1, 2027.
  - Create a report from the Commonwealth to various committees in the Legislature that outlines the current disparity amount and the annual increases necessary to eliminate the disparity amount by July 1, 2027.
  - Create a report from the Commonwealth to various committees in the Legislature that makes recommendations about how to strengthen recruitment and retention of human services workers at private, community-based human services nonprofits.
  - Apply to human services workers employed by private, community-based human services nonprofits that have contracts with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Department of Housing and Community Development and Department of Early Education and Care to provide services.
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## ***An act establishing an education loan repayment program for human services workers***

**Bill purpose:** To provide student loan repayment to human services workers who provide essential services to one-in-ten state residents. The bill would help human service organizations recruit and retain a stronger, more qualified workforce.

**Recent action:** H.266 (Reps. Roy, Pignatelli) and S. 120 (Sen. Lesser) reported favorably in February 2022. Bills referred to House/Senate committees on Ways & Means.

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### **Key Facts:**

- Many human services workers' salaries start between \$14 and \$15 an hour. Minimum wage increased to \$13.50 on January 1, 2021 and increased to \$14.25 on January 1, 2022.
- The lack of affordable higher education for human services workers and the burden of student debt greatly contribute to the sector's recruitment and retention difficulties.
- According to The Institute for College Access and Success, more than 60 percent of seniors graduating from public and nonprofit colleges in 2019 had student loan debt with an average of \$28,950 per person. Massachusetts is higher with an average student loan debt of \$33,259.
- The problem grows increasingly worse in Massachusetts, as a 2018 report from the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center shows that average student loan debt in Massachusetts grew by 77 percent between '04 and '16 – faster than all but one other state.
- More than 75 percent of human service workers have attended some college or have a degree.

### **If passed, this legislation would:**

- Amend Section 16 of Chapter 6A to create a student loan repayment program for human service workers making less than \$50,000 per year.
  - Help organizations retain human services workers by having the state repay qualified education loans at a rate not to exceed \$150/month for a period not to exceed 48 months. Payments will be made directly to the lender and only during months the participant is working 35+ hours per week as a human services worker in Massachusetts.
  - Assist human services organizations in the recruitment and retention of **human service workers**.
  - Pay back **qualified education loans**, meaning any indebtedness – including interest – to pay tuition or other direct expenses incurred in connection with the pursuit of a certificate, undergraduate or graduate degree by an applicant.
  - Direct EOHHS to administer the program in accordance with DOE guidelines.
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