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2023-2024 Legislative Agenda

The Providers' Council discussed legislative priorities with its statewide human service membership prior to the start of the session in January 2023. 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:

An act relative to a livable wage for human services workers

House Bill filed by Rep. Kay Khan (House 191)

Senate Bill filed by Sen. Cindy Friedman (Senate 84)

Sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities in March 2023.

Similar job titles and roles exist for individuals employed by the Commonwealth and those employed at 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 without a livable wage.

This bill would set a schedule to eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those employed by community-based human services nonprofits who are doing similar work, providing care and services to residents on behalf of the Commonwealth. It would ensure a livable wage for workers, as well as 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.

An act relative to a loan repayment program for human services workers

House Bill filed by Reps. Jeffrey Roy, Smitty Pignatelli (House 214)

Senate Bill filed by Sen. Sal DiDomenico (Senate 77)

Sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities in March 2023.

Many human services workers' salaries start at just between \$17 and \$19 an hour – below the starting salaries offered by many big box retailers. 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 and have maintained 12 consecutive months of employment in the sector. Applicants would be eligible for up to \$6,000 to repay their qualified education loans if they have an associate degree, up to \$20,000 if they have a bachelor's degree and up to \$30,000 if they have a master's degree.

For more information:

Contact Stefan Geller at sgeller@providers.org or call 508.599.2245.

An act relative to a livable wage for human services workers

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.191 (Rep. Khan) and S.84 (Sen. Friedman) sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities in March 2023.

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 160,000 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, 2024.
- 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 by January 1, 2024.
- 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 and Department of Housing and Community Development to provide services.

For more information:

Contact Stefan Geller at sgeller@providers.org or call 508.599.2245.

An act relative to a 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.214 (Reps. Roy, Pignatelli) and S.77 (Sen. DiDomenico) sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities in March 2023.

Key Facts:

- Many human services workers' salaries start between \$17 and \$19 an hour. MIT calculations show that a living wage for a childless individual in Massachusetts is nearly \$22 an hour.
- 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, 56 percent of college graduates in Massachusetts had student loan debt in 2019-2020 with an average of \$33,457 per person, placing the state eighth highest nationally on the institute's measure.
- According to a 2022 report published by the Education Data Initiative, nearly 13 percent of Massachusetts residents – more than one in eight – have some student loan debt.
- 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 who have maintained 12 consecutive months of employment in their roles at a minimum of 35 hours per week and hold certificates or undergraduate/graduate degrees.
- **Help organizations recruit and retain human services workers** by having the state repay qualified education loans. Applicants would be eligible for up to \$6,000 if they have an associate degree, up to \$20,000 if they have a bachelor's degree and up to \$30,000 if they have a master's degree.
- 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.
- 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.

For more information:

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