

2025-2026 Legislative Agenda

The Providers' Council discussed legislative priorities with its statewide human service membership prior to the start of the session in January 2025. 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. Mindy Domb (HD.3396)
Senate Bill filed by Sen. Cindy Friedman (SD.1201)

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 (HD.503)
Senate Bill filed by Sen. Sal DiDomenico (SD.1820)

Direct Care I workers' salaries are benchmarked to \$20.79 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 70 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 Caroline O'Neill at coneill@providers.org or call 508.598.9686.

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: HD.3396 (Rep. Domb) and SD.1201 (Sen. Friedman) filed in the House and Senate in January 2025.

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 with state workers paid significantly more.
- 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 lower than what the state pays for similar positions.
- Due to this salary disparity, it has become 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.
 - Executive Office of Health and Human Services will issue a report to legislative committees on April 1, 2025, detailing the disparity amount and the annual increases necessary to address the disparity. This report, mandated by line item 1599-6903 in the Chapter 257 Rate Reserve in the FY '25 budget, will provide critical guidance for modifying the bill to ensure the funding aligns with the sector's needs.
 - Eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those at community-based human services nonprofits no later than July 1, 2029.
 - 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 Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to provide services.
 - Ensure annual reports are provided by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and the Department of Early Education and Care – in collaboration with the Providers' Council – and sent to House and Senate committees detailing the ongoing scope of the pay disparity and a schedule for phasing it out by July 1, 2029.
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For more information:

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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 hundreds of thousands of residents. The bill would help human service organizations recruit and retain a stronger workforce.

Recent action: HD.503 (Rep. Roy) and SD.1820 (Sen. DiDomenico) filed in the House and Senate in January 2025.

Key Facts:

- Direct Care I workers' salaries are benchmarked to \$20.79 an hour. MIT Living Wage calculator puts that figure for a single person with no children in Massachusetts at nearly \$28 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.
- As of the first half of 2024, the average student loan balance in Massachusetts increased by \$2,332 from the end of 2023, reaching \$39,906.
- In 2024, Massachusetts residents had a median monthly student loan payment of \$226, the second highest in the nation.
- Approximately 70% of human service workers have attended some college or have a degree.
- The one-time ARPA-funded student loan repayment program, launched in 2024, received requests totaling more than three times its \$16.5 million allocation.

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 degrees or certificates.
- Priority for funding will be given to applicants with at least three years of human services experience, those working in Advancing Health Equity in Massachusetts (AHEM) communities, individuals earning less than \$60,000 annually, and those who provide care in a non-English language needed at their workplace.
- **Help organizations recruit retain human services workers** by having the state repay qualified education loans. Applicants would be eligible for up to \$6,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 depending on their degree or certificate.
- Applicants must agree to a service commitment in an eligible setting: 1 year for an associate degree, 2 years for a bachelor's degree, and 3 years for a master's degree.
- Make payments 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 – incurred by applicants in the pursuit of a certificate or degree.
- Direct EOHHS to administer the program in accordance with DOE guidelines.

For more information:

Contact Caroline O'Neill at conell@providers.org or call 508.598.9686.

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