



National Association of Social Workers

Hawaii Chapter

November 21, 2005

Ms. Marie Laderta, Director  
 Department of Human Resources Development  
 235 S. Beretania St.  
 Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Ms. Marie Laderta:

The National Association of Social Workers, Hawaii Chapter (NASW), was pleased to participate in the discussions to develop a transition plan as required by Act 238 and HCR 265, SLH 2005. We appreciated the collaborative spirit that all parties brought to the table to ensure that the intent of the legislation was fulfilled. We would especially like to thank the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution for facilitating the meetings and assisting us to meet our goals.

While all parties worked effectively to develop a transition plan, we recognized a basic difference in missions between the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Hawaii Chapter and the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD). NASW is the largest membership organization of professional social workers. The organization works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. Coming from this perspective, NASW believes that professionally educated and trained social workers are the best qualified to provide social services for people in need. On the other hand, DHRD's charge is to recruit qualified individuals to fill state positions. The following issues were identified and discussed at these meetings but were deemed to be outside the purview of DHRD's responsibility and must be addressed through different forums.

Licensing of State Social Workers. Currently, social workers employed by the government are exempt from the Hawaii licensing law, HRS 467E. All social workers in social work positions in the private sector are required to be licensed. Although exempt, the Federal government has chosen to require their social workers to be licensed. Licensing protects consumers of social work services, contributes to the quality of those services, and attracts third party reimbursement. NASW continues to consider licensing a long-term goal for state social workers but acknowledges that there is a need for discussion with state departments regarding benefits, liabilities, and barriers.

Differentiation of roles and responsibilities between Social Workers and Human Service Professionals. As Act 238 and HCR 265 establishes two separate series, this is an opportune time to redefine and separate the roles and responsibilities of Social Workers and HSP's. State Departments providing social services, health and mental health, education, and

public safety, as well as NASW, the Hawaii Government Employee's Association (HGEA), and schools of social work could begin to examine services provided and how to more effectively utilize the skills and knowledge base differences between these two separate classes. NASW firmly believes that social work education and training, the social work code of ethics, and social work values distinguish a profession and enables individuals who attain a social work degree to provide quality services to individuals, families, groups, and communities through assessment, prevention, treatment, research, social policy, and advocacy.

Supervision. The provision of quality social work services entails supervision of social workers by those who have a social work degree, the required time of service, administrative abilities, leadership qualities, and experience. It is important to provide the oversight and case consultation by social work supervisors who have the overall responsibility for clients assigned to their unit. Professional credentials also require supervision provided by social workers, and the ability to attain these credentials may be a recruitment and retention factor for social workers.

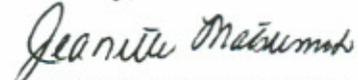
Compensation. During the discussions, the Attorney General was asked to provide an opinion on whether or not the State could provide higher compensation for individuals who had a degree but was performing the same duties as someone without a degree. The April 19, 2005 opinion was that such an action was allowable. NASW sees this as an excellent recruitment tool and urges State Departments and HGEA to consider how to provide higher compensation for social workers with social work degrees.

DHRD's authority. DHRD notes in the conclusion of the legislative report that they took action to establish separate Social Worker and HSP series "*because HRD alone has the statutory responsibility and authority to establish and modify civil service classes of work. That assignment of responsibility and authority is based on the premise that HRD staff has the expertise to determine appropriate position classification and actions.... We believe that matters of position classification should be determined by the department charged with that responsibility, on the basis of technical analysis, rather than through legislation.*" While DHRD correctly states that it is their responsibility and authority to handle classification matters for the state, the legislation was introduced during the 2005 session in response to DHRD's action to establish one series called Social Worker/Human Service Professional (SW/HSP), and allow individuals hired into this series to call themselves a Social Worker or a Human Service Professional regardless of their degree. Had DHRD acknowledged the Social Work profession and protected the title of Social Worker, the legislation would not have been drafted and introduced. NASW felt strongly that the SW/HSP series was doing a disservice to the public by combining SW and HSPs into one class. NASW believes that there is a difference between professionally trained social workers and those who do not have the social work degree performing the same duties. While the combination of SW/HSP class would alleviate some recruitment problems for the state, it does little to improve the quality of services the state is providing to the public. It was appropriate for the Legislature to intervene and state it's preference for professionally trained social workers to continue to provide social services for the state.

NASW is committed to working with the State to recruit and retain qualified social workers to serve the people of Hawai'i. We appreciate the efforts of DHRD, the various state

departments, HGEA and the schools of social work in this endeavor and look forward to continued discussions with them.

Sincerely,

  
Jeanette Matsumoto, LSW  
President-elect

  
Sharon Otagaki, LSW  
NASW Legislative Committee Chair

  
Debbie Shimizu, LSW  
Executive Director