

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

School of Social Work
Office of the Dean

November 10, 2004


Senator Brian Kanno
Chair, Labor Committee
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 202
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Senator Kanno:

This is a follow up of our initial letter dated August 23, 2004 regarding the State of Hawai'i, Department of Human Resources Development's plan to establish a general human service professional series and eliminate the social work series as of May 1, 2004. However, Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR No. 127 SD1 HD1) was heard on April 23, 2004 and passed and DHRD was required to delay implementation for a minimum of three months until they consulted with NASW, UHSSW, HPU, BYUH and HGEA.

There have been several meetings involving all of the major parties resulting in the attached report. We would appreciate your reviewing this report and supporting the retention of the social work series, as well as efforts to enhance social work education in Hawaii.

Mahalo,



Jon K. Matsuoka, Ph.D.
Interim Dean and Professor

c: Governor Linda Lingle
Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland
Rep. Michael Kahikina
Chancellor Peter Englert, UHM
Dr. Chiyome Fukino, Director of Health
Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent of Education
Lillian Koller, Dir., Dept. Of Human Services
John Peyton, Dir., Dept. Of Public Safety

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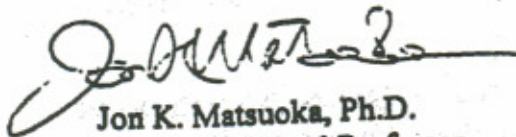
Representative Marcus R. Oshiro
Chair, Labor & Public Employment Committee
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 439
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Representative Oshiro:

This is a follow up of our initial letter dated August 23, 2004 regarding the State of Hawai'i, Department of Human Resources Development's plan to establish a general human service professional series and eliminate the social work series as of May 1, 2004. However, Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR No. 127 SD1 HD1) was heard on April 23, 2004 and passed and DHRD was required to delay implementation for a minimum of three months until they consulted with NASW, UHSSW, HPU, BYUH and HGEA.

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Policy Options to Address the Social Worker Shortage

Introduction

The policy options contained in this report are intended to provide direction to the Governor, the Legislature, line departments, colleges and universities in taking actions that will result in an increased supply of social workers to meet the state's needs and to minimize turnover. All interested parties recognize the effect of the state's social worker shortage has on the quality of services provided to children, adults and families serviced by our public social service agencies.

In 1990, the Legislative Auditor issued a report entitled *Study of the Social Worker Shortage Among State Agencies*. It recognized that the factors contributing to the shortage of social workers were varied, complex and not easily resolved. That remains an accurate assessment of the current shortage as well.

In October 1989, about one-third of social worker positions were vacant. Although the social worker vacancy rate has improved somewhat since then, it was 19% at the end of 2003 (171 vacancies out of 912 positions in the executive branch).¹ Vacancy rates of 19% to 33% can have a detrimental impact on access to social services and quality of care. According to a study done by the American Public Human Services Association in 2001, found that most vacancies are the result of turnovers, with 50% or more being preventable. Turnover, especially when preventable, causes staff recruitment problems as the jobs are perceived as undesirable.

The Legislative Auditor found that the shortage of social workers in Hawaii was intensified by a limited supply of social workers and an increasing demand for social services. Another related problem was the inability of the state's personnel system to adequately address salary concerns through shortage differentials. Poor working conditions and workload were also listed as problems, especially in Child Protective Services. In a shortage situation, jobs that are more demanding and less attractive are difficult to fill.

Among the recommendations made by the Legislative Auditor in this report were:

- The University of Hawaii has a major role to play in increasing the number of social workers in the state. The UH should consider giving the school more budgetary resources to meet the state's demand for social workers. It should also take an active role in staff development to support state social service agencies.
- Establish a task force comprised of state departments, the UH School of Social Work and the states central personnel agency because the problem extends beyond the purview of any single entity. This task force would:
 1. Monitor the shortage of social workers and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches used to address the shortage among various agencies;
 2. Review the social worker classification to determine whether other degrees can be substituted for the M.S.W. for some or all social worker positions and whether social work specialties (separate classes and pricing) or other human services classifications should be developed.

Unfortunately, few of these recommendations were implemented until recently The Department

¹ Statistics from the Department of Human Resources Development

of Human Resources Development (DHRD) has developed a human services professional classification along with specialized social worker classes and pricing that took effect on May 1, 2004. These are promising developments that should help to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers and fill vacant positions. However, these steps alone will not be sufficient to stop turnover and fill vacancies. It is also important to carefully monitor how well the human services professionals perform in jobs previously performed by social workers and what additional training they may need.

Compounding the problem is that the state Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (KLIR) projects an increase in the employment of social workers of 25.9% from 2000-2010. While all types of social worker positions are expected to gain, those in mental health and substance abuse are expected to grow at more than 43%. Average openings due to growth will exceed openings created due to replacement needs. In Hawaii, 40% of the state's social workers are public employees.²

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the employment of social workers is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012. They attribute this growth to the rapidly growing number of elderly persons, and the aging of the baby boom generation. Together, these factors will create additional demand for social services and sharp increase in the need for social workers trained in gerontology.³

Like the DLIR, the BLS projects significant growth in the employment of substance abuse social workers. Many substance abusers are placed into treatment programs instead of being sent to prison. If this trend continues, the demand will increase for social workers to assist those needing drug treatment.⁴

At the same time, the dynamics of the workforce are changing. The emerging problem caused by the retirement of the baby boomers represents the most serious loss of talent and experience ever experienced by government at all levels.⁵ Added to the issue of trying to retain experienced social workers are the problems of attracting and retaining younger workers. Only 21% of college seniors majoring in liberal arts or social work said they were seriously considering employment in a human services job, according to a 2002 survey.⁶

Staff turnover and vacancies in social work positions are caused by a complex set of issues that are multi-dimensional. Because there are many factors at play, considerable variations can occur even within a particular state. This is why states must do a careful analysis of their particular situation to develop effective strategies to respond to the challenge. An important source of information in this process is to conduct worker surveys, focus groups and exit interviews of social workers.⁷ These can be done by line departments with the assistance of the Department of Human Resources Development.

There is no quick fix to deal with the problems of turnover and vacancies. States and counties

² Dept. of Labor and Industrial Relations Exploring Social Worker Jobs in Hawaii March 2003

³ U.S. Dept. of Labor BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook – Social Workers

⁴ U.S. Dept. of Labor BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook – Social Workers

⁵ Master Plan for Social Work Education in the State of California, p. 48.

⁶ AdvoCasey Spring 2004 and The Health of the Human Services Workforce March 2003, Brookings Institution

⁷ American Public Human Services Association Report from the Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State and County Data Findings, May 2001

have relied on a mix of multiple, well-coordinated strategies that are targeted to deal with the specific turnover and vacancy problems they have. Increasing salaries and reducing caseloads are important strategies; however, they were rated only "somewhat effective" in addressing turnover and vacancy problems, according to a 2001 report prepared by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) based upon survey of 43 state-administered child welfare systems and 48 counties in 7 locally administered states.⁸ Competitive Salaries and manageable caseloads are a necessary, but not a total solution to the problems of turnover and vacancies.

Other strategies for addressing staff turnover were found to be also effective, including increased in-service training, increased educational opportunities, increased/improved supervision management, increased/improved orientation, increased worker safety and flexible working hours. Many of these options do not require large amounts of new resources and focus on the nature of work rather than salaries or positions. The positive findings of the APHSA report are that a number of strategies and options that could reduce preventable turnover and high vacancy rates are already available to administrators.

Worker satisfaction surveys from 10 states contained in the APHSA report confirm the importance of these less costly retention strategies. The most frequent recommendations from workers were: improved supervision – management, staff communication and fairness on the job. Increased wages and decreased caseloads were the next most frequent recommendations.

According to the APHSA survey, a majority of states responding provided educational financial support for child welfare workers to pursue BSW degrees (25 states) and MSW degrees (34 states). Funding for this educational support came from the Title IV-E funds and state funds.

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report in 2003 entitled *Child Welfare – HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff*. The GAO found that university partnership to train current workers or prepare social worker students for positions in the child welfare field are widespread and some have demonstrated improvements related to recruitment and retention. Fewer than 15% of child welfare agencies require caseworkers to hold a B.S.W. or M.S.W. even though there are studies showing that both degrees correlate with higher job performance and lower turnover rates among caseworkers.⁹

According to the GAO, more than 40 state agencies have formed child welfare partnerships between schools of social work and public welfare agencies to provide stipends to students using Title IV-E federal funds and state funds. These programs are designed to prepare students for a career in child welfare and to further develop the skills of current workers.¹⁰

The relationship between state agencies and universities varies by state. For example, in some states, the agency only acts as a conduit of federal funds, while in others, agencies work with schools of social work to develop curriculum and design the internship program. The programs

⁸ American Public Human Services Association, Report from the Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State and County Data Findings, May 2001

⁹ GAO Report Child Welfare HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff, p.5

¹⁰ GAO Report, p.25

required that as a condition of receiving the stipend, students must commit to employment with the state or county public welfare agency for a specified period, usually 1-2 years. While there are not a large number of studies on the impact of Title IV-E training partnerships, those that are available indicate that they improve worker retention. A 2002 study cited by the GAO found that it had a positive effect on retention – 93% continued to be employed in the child welfare field and 52% remained with public agencies longer than required.¹¹

Possible Solutions

Educating and Training More Social Workers

The State of Hawaii needs to produce more professional social workers and recruit professionally trained social workers (BSWs and MSWs). This can be accomplished by:

- Increasing the capacity of existing BSW and MSW social work programs.
- Increasing the number of social work faculty positions.
- Improving social work faculty salaries.
- Developing new MSW and BSW programs in public and private colleges and universities in Hawaii. (Hawaii Pacific University is currently developing an MSW program.)
- Providing stipends, scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to BSW and MSW students with requirements that they work in the public sector for a specific period of time.
- Providing support for the expansion of community college programs preparing students for careers in social work and social services.
- Developing stipends for community college students to get an AA degree in human services.
- Developing human services academies at the high school level to attract youth into social work and human services careers.
- Developing affiliation agreements between accredited social work programs to facilitate the creative pooling of select resources, such as faculty.
- Creating a one-stop information, recruitment and referral service for people considering or pursuing a career in social work. California used such a program to address the teacher shortage through various communications tools such as radio and television spots and internet banners and enlisting the support of government and non-profit organizations to encourage youth people to become teachers.
- Developing distance education programs in social work that are web-based or conducted through the UH educational television system to address the shortage of professionally trained social workers on the neighbor islands where social problems are serious and often unmet.
- Creating a coalition of accredited social work programs similar to the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), which is the nation's largest state coalition of social work educators and practitioners. It is a consortium of the state's 17 accredited social work graduate schools, the 58 county departments of social services and mental health, the California Department of Social Services, and the NASW, California Chapter that facilitates the integration of education and practice to assure effective, culturally competent service delivery and leadership to the

¹¹ GAO Report, p. 25

people of California. Among the key goals of CalSWEC are:

- Recruiting and preparing a diverse group of social workers for careers in public human service with special emphasis on child welfare;
 - Defining and operationalizing a continuum of social work education and training;
 - Engaging in research and evaluation of best practices in social work;
 - Advocating for responsive social policies and appropriate resources.¹²
- In Hawaii, such a coalition could involve BYU Hawaii, HPU and UH Manoa, as well as the DOH, DHS, PSD, DOE, Judiciary, and the NASW Hawaii Chapter.
 - Increasing funding for faculty who are trained in “resource maximization”. They know how to obtain federal monies for program development and/or they have skills in grant-writing aimed at developing the infrastructure and ultimately the capacity of the school to train more social workers.
 - Increasing the ease and appeal of hiring by creating more online job applications, weekly announcements of opening and shorter time periods to submit job applications. The objective is to make hiring faster, friendlier and more efficient to attract high quality workers.

Workforce Retention

Retention of experienced social workers is an extremely important goal because turnover creates problems in the quality of services delivered and places additional stress on the remaining staff, thereby creating even more turnover. Turnover can represent a potentially serious loss of institutional knowledge, leadership and experience for state social services. Retaining social workers can be accomplished by:

- Connecting job opportunities, social work education, and training programs at all levels of the social work education.¹³
- Providing better supervision, which is critical in retaining social workers, by establishing supervisor training standards.
- Changing poor management and supervision when it exists.
- Developing a training academy for supervisors that would provide skills in mentoring, coaching, communication and problem-solving skills. Training is a significant tool for effective supervision, despite the common assumption that a person’s years of experience will make them effective supervisors.
- Reducing social workers’ caseloads by applying reasonable caseload standards. This is a major issue for those in child welfare.
- Reducing the amount of time social workers spend completing paperwork by developing a computer system and administrative support personnel that will free up workers to spend more time in direct services to families, etc.
- Reviewing administrative requirements departments currently place on social

¹² CalSWEC website Goals

¹³ California Master Plan for Social Work Education suggest that an educational response and workforce development plan be implemented that addresses education and training opportunities at all levels of education from high school to Ph.D.

workers to identify those which could be eliminated, simplified, or conducted by support staff.

- Institutionalizing professional development opportunities for staff such as paid tuition programs, tuition assistance, paid participation at conferences and free or reduced-cost training and continuing education.
- Creating incentives for ongoing professional development.
- Increasing worker recognition and status.
- Offering more competitive salaries. Inadequate compensation in social work increases the relative attractiveness of the private sector and other occupations that utilize aspects of the social work skill set. Compensation and benefits must commensurate with the responsibilities of the job.
- Developing direct practitioner career paths comparable to the salaries and benefits of administrators and managers that build on worker's skills rather than moving them "up and out".
- Improving physical working conditions.
- Increasing the flexibility of work schedules that help workers balance work and family obligations.
- Creating a more positive public image for social workers and their agencies through a media campaign that lets the public and decision makers know how important social work is to stopping the cycle of abuse, keeping children out of expensive foster care and the juvenile justice system, and preventing future problems. (A public employee union in California conducted a social work awareness campaign consisting of a traveling photo exhibit featuring social workers with clients, along with short stories and text for display at public places, libraries, and government offices.)
- Linking increased compensation to increased training.
- Developing career advancement by adding new rungs to career ladders that recognize seniority and work performance.

Conclusion

There are several factors that affect recruitment and retention of social workers and which must be addressed if Hawaii's needs are to be met. The demand for social workers will continue to grow in all program areas (child welfare, mental health, developmental disabilities and school social work) as the population increases, ages and becomes more diverse.

Federal legislation is another factor that must be taken into account. The federal government has established national standards for child safety and permanency. State agencies will be held responsible for achieving specific goals for children in out-of-home care. These national standards will likely increase the demand for social workers across the country.

Resolving the social worker shortage will be difficult, and there is no single comprehensive solution. The problems associated with frontline human service delivery need to be approached in several different ways, with strategies geared toward the needs and dynamics of the various frontline sectors. A variety of approaches and service reforms previously mentioned can make a difference.

A long-term effective plan must be implemented to educate, recruit and retain competent social work professionals. Since the problems and solutions are multi-dimensional, it will require a

well-coordinated effort on the part of the Governor, state agencies, the legislature, institutions of higher education, both public and private, NASW, HGEA, and the federal government to improve the current situation and ensure that quality social services are available to the people of Hawaii. Policymakers will need to provide the increased levels of support to effectively respond to the shortage of social workers.

This is important not only as a matter of fairness to these employees or because it will result in more effective and efficient social services programs, but most of all for what it could mean in the lives and futures of those for whom these services were created in the first place.

To keep the momentum generated by S.C.R. 127, it is our belief that Hawaii needs an organizational framework to continue the important discussion about how we can resolve the shortage of social workers in the public sector. One potential model is the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), previously mentioned in this report. Although the initial focus of CalSWEC was on child welfare, it has expanded to include mental health and aging services. The concept here could be expanded to include all areas of social work in the public sector.

CalSWEC is a consortium of the state's graduate schools of social work, the county departments of social services and mental health, the California Department of Social Services and the California Chapter of the NASW. When it was established in 1990, CalSWEC was considered a unique collaboration of government and academia and attracted national attention. This was the first time the social work academic community and public social services worked together to improve the education and training of social workers for publicly supported social services.

The current shortage of trained social workers indicates that a common approach to workforce development is needed, and an organization like CalSWEC, with its emphasis on collaborative problem solving, provides a means to do so. Locally, this kind of model could be used to create, pilot and evaluate new approaches to workforce development and service delivery for public social services.¹⁴ Social work research can provide empirical support for best practice approaches to improve service delivery and public policies. It can also encourage innovation by integrating university research with public sector social services and social work curriculum development at the undergraduate and graduate levels.¹⁵ Potential funding sources for this consortium include state and federal funding and foundation grants. The consortium could also possibly exist as a non-profit independent corporation (501c3).

¹⁴ 2001 Annual Report California Social Work Education Center -Focusing on Public Services pp.6-7

¹⁵ CalSWEC website History