

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2002

As Reported by House Committee On:
College & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to creating the social work professional loan repayment program.

Brief Description: Creating the social work professional loan repayment program.

Sponsors: Representatives Ortiz-Self, Bergquist, Santos and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 1/28/20, 2/5/20 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Social Work Professional Loan Repayment Program (Program) for credentialed social workers employed with the Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration or the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council's Office of Student Financial Assistance to administer the Program under the umbrella of the Washington Health Corps.
- Establishes the Social Work Professional Loan Repayment Program Account.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Mead, Paul, Pollet, Ramos, Rude, Sells, Slatter and Sutherland.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Young.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Kraft.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

Social Workers in Washington State.

A person may only use the designation of social worker if the person is licensed by the Department of Health as a social worker, or has graduated with at least a bachelor's degree from a social work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Licensure is dependent on education and experience. State agencies also employ social service specialists to provide a range of tasks related to social work, including assessments, interviews, and investigations into abandonment, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Washington Health Corps.

In 2019 the Legislature established the Washington Health Corps, an umbrella program consisting of the existing Health Professional Loan Repayment Program (HPLRP) and the new Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program (BHLRP).

The HPLRP provides licensed health care professionals with student loan repayment if the professional agrees to serve in a rural or underserved urban area with a designated shortage. The BHLRP provides licensed health care professionals with student loan repayment if the professional agrees to serve in underserved behavioral health areas. Both programs provide up to \$75,000 in loan repayment for a minimum three-year service obligation. The participant must work a minimum of a 24-hour work week, and if the participant defaults on his or her service obligation, the penalty is either an amount equal to the unsatisfied portion of the service obligation or the total amount paid by the program, whichever is less.

The 2019 eligible health care professionals included Doctors of Medicine, Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine, Naturopathic Doctors, Doctors of Dental Surgery, Doctors of Medicine in Dentistry, Registered Dental Hygienists, Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Certified Nurse Midwives, Licensed Midwives, Pharmacists, Licensed Clinical Psychologists, Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, and Licensed Mental Health Counselors.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Social Work Professional Loan Repayment Program (Program) is established to provide loan repayment to credentialed social work professionals who provide social work services on behalf of the Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration (DSHS) or the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). To qualify, a social worker must have been employed by the DSHS or the DCYF for two years and either:

- be licensed as a social worker;
- have a bachelor's degree from a social work educational program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education; or
- be employed as a social service specialist.

The Program is placed under the umbrella of the Washington Health Corps, with the Washington Student Achievement Council's (WSAC) Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) as program administrator. The Office, in consultation with the DSHS and the DCYF, must establish criteria to select participants. The Office may consider criteria that permits a social worker to apply for loan repayment while pursuing a Master of Social Work and employed with the DSHS or the DCYF. Student loans eligible for repayment under the Program include those used to receive a bachelor's degree from an accredited social work educational program, or a bachelor's degree in social services, human services, behavioral sciences, criminal justice, or an allied field.

Participants must allow the Office access to loan records and to necessary information from lenders to verify eligibility and to determine payments. A participant may receive loan repayments quarterly, or more frequently, until either the loan is repaid, the participant discontinues service as a social worker for the DSHS or the DCYF, or the award limit is reached. If a participant discontinues service, the loan repayments will cease to be effective on the date of the discontinued service.

The Social Work Professional Loan Repayment Program Fund is created in the custody of the State Treasurer.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill placed the Program under the umbrella of the Washington Health Corps, using the existing administrative structure. The requirement for the WSAC to collaborate with the DSHS and the DCYF on selection criteria was added. In addition, the definition of social worker was expanded to include social service specialists, and the types of student loans that are eligible for repayment under the Program were expanded to those used to receive a bachelor degree in social services, human services, behavioral services, criminal justice, or an allied field.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Social work is an important and intense field, and one in which it is hard to recruit staff. It can be dangerous, the pay is insufficient, and often social workers have to respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The return rate of placing children back with their families is being impacted by social worker turnover. The cost to retrain new social workers is high. Social workers stay for two years and then leave the profession to earn more money. However, it takes two years to become proficient. Social workers want to work with vulnerable families, but they cannot afford to stay in the profession. If the state can hold on

to these social workers for five years, then supervising opportunities open up. One way to incentivize social workers to stay in the field is by helping them repay their student loans, which can generate a monthly payment of hundreds of dollars. This bill is good for retaining workers in state agencies, and it matters for child welfare. It makes sense to use an existing structure.

This should be amended to reflect the current job class, which is social service specialist, not social worker. Also, two years is often the breaking point, so maybe a social worker should qualify for the loan repayment sooner.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Michelle Hetzel and Deidra Van Every, Washington Federation of State Employees; Bob Cooper, National Association of Social Workers, Washington Chapter; and Maggie Dunham Jordhal, Graduate and Professional Students of the University of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.