SENATE RESOLUTION No. 97

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 9, 2024

Sponsored by:
Senator ANGELA V. MCKNIGHT
District 31 (Hudson)

SYNOPSIS

Urges Governor and Legislature to establish initiatives towards education of social workers.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

A SENATE RESOLUTION urging the Governor and Legislature to invest in the education of social workers.

WHEREAS, Social workers play a crucial role in improving the well-being of the people of New Jersey and helping the State become a better place to live; and

WHEREAS, Social workers are trained to look at situations in a holistic way, bringing people together with others and their communities to find ways to address pressing individual, group, and societal problems, such as hunger, addiction, and affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, As an essential segment of the workforce, social workers served on the frontlines helping communities directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering behavioral health services to individuals in crisis, and in many cases risking their lives to ensure that care remained accessible for those in need of assistance; and

WHEREAS, Social work programs at institutions of higher education prepare the pipeline of professionals to serve in a number of capacities that ensure the social safety-net across the country, including working in government, schools, universities, social service agencies, communities, the military, and in health care and mental health organizations; and

WHEREAS, Obtaining a graduate degree is an often necessary, and expensive, investment for many social workers; and

WHEREAS, For example, in order to become a licensed clinical social worker in the State, an applicant is required to receive either a master's or doctorate degree in social work; as a result, in 2021, approximatively 63,000 students sought to obtain a master's degree, and 2,126 sought to obtain a doctoral degree; and

WHEREAS, According to the Council on Social Work Education, educational debt for social work graduates is higher today than it was 10 years ago; in fact, 71.3 percent of baccalaureate graduates and 76 percent of master's graduates were in substantial educational loan debt; and

WHEREAS, In 2021, the average loan debt was approximately $26,500 for a baccalaureate graduate, $48,000 for a master's graduate, and $135,000 for a doctorate graduate; and

WHEREAS, The student loan debt burden carried by social workers is further compounded by the low salaries and compensation afforded to this segment of the workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a social worker's median salary is only $50,390; and

WHEREAS, Failure to address the student loan crisis faced by social workers will continue to economically harm those in practice and dissuade prospective social workers from entering the field; and

WHEREAS, It is altogether necessary and proper for the State to establish initiatives, such as creating scholarships and loan redemption programs, that invest in, and support, students that wish to become social workers; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the Senate of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This House respectfully urges the Governor and the Legislature to work together to establish initiatives, such as creating scholarships and loan redemption programs, that invest in the education of students seeking to obtain baccalaureate and graduate degrees in social work in order to incentivize the career and ensure that the State has a qualified and educated workforce.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the Governor and to each member of the State Legislature.

STATEMENT

This resolution urges the Governor and the Legislature to establish initiatives towards the education of students seeking degrees in social work.

Social workers play a crucial role in improving the well-being of the people of New Jersey and helping the State become a better place to live. As essential workers, social workers played a crucial role in helping communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educational debt for social work graduates has continued to rise over the past 10 years. According to the Council on Social Work Education, 71.3 percent of baccalaureate graduates and 76 percent of master's graduates were in substantial educational loan debt. In 2021, the average loan debt was approximately $26,500 for a baccalaureate graduate, $48,000 for a master's graduate, and $135,000 for a doctorate graduate.

The student loan debt burden carried by social workers is further compounded by the low salaries and compensation afforded to this segment of the workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a social worker's median salary is only $50,390. Failure to address the student loan crisis faced by social workers will continue to economically harm those in practice and dissuade prospective social workers from entering the field.

This resolution urges the Governor and the Legislature to work together to establish initiatives, such as creating scholarships and loan redemption programs, that invest in the education of students seeking to obtain baccalaureate and graduate degrees in social work in order to incentivize the career and ensure that the State has a qualified and educated workforce.