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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR: Knauer DATE TYPED: 03/04/01 HB 316/aHGUAC
 SHORT TITLE: Amend Social Work Practice Act SB _____
 ANALYST: Chabot

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY01	FY02	FY01	FY02		
	NFI				

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files
 Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)
 Corrections Department
 Miner's Hospital
 Public Defender Department
 Veterans' Service Commission
 Western New Mexico University

No Response

Department of Health (DOH)
 Commission on Higher Education (CHE)
 New Mexico State University

SUMMARY

Synopsis of HGUAC Amendment

The House Government and Urban Affairs Committee amendment states that a person hired as a social worker with other than a social work degree must have bachelor's degree in sociology, psychology, counseling or other related human service field and must agree to obtain the necessary social worker degree through the social work education programs offered by CYFD in conjunction with accredited schools of social work.

Synopsis of Original Bill

This bill amends the Social Work Practice Act (SWPA), Section 61-31-4 NMSA 1978, for the purpose of allowing CYFD to hire individuals through July 1, 2003, with a bachelor's degree or higher in a field other than social work to perform duties as social workers or to positions where the

duties and authorities are determined to be social work practice. Individuals hired will not be required to be licensed as a social worker until July 1, 2005. An emergency clause is attached to the bill.

Significant Issues

To obtain social work licensure, a individual must have either a bachelors or masters degree in social work, pass a national exam and pass a cultural competence test. New Mexico is one of three states that require individuals engaging in social work to be licensed.

CYFD is experiencing a high turnover and vacancy rates for social workers. According to the Citizens Review Board, the average tenure of social workers in the Protective Services Division (PSD) of CYFD is 1.7 years. An analysis of the December 29, 2000 Table of Organization Listing reveals that the vacancy rate for social workers in the department is 13.9 percent. Many of the social worker vacancies are in small offices where the impact is greater than the overall average indicates. PSD field offices with rates exceeding 30 percent are Alamogordo, Grants, Lovington, and Silver City.

CYFD is supporting the bill because it will increase the pool of candidates to fill social worker positions and help relieve the shortage. While it is not a requirement of the bill, CYFD states it will hire college graduates in fields related to social work which they define as sociology, counseling or psychology. Individuals hired under this provision would receive enhanced training and, eventually, experience. CYFD would provide these individuals with the opportunity to earn degrees in social work by July 1, 2005 through federal grant funds and an adjusted work schedule to encourage participation. CYFD states that social worker standards will not be diminished or eroded under this program because individuals hired will be given close supervision and specific training for their assigned duties.

The Board of Social Worker Examiners opposes the bill because those hired from related fields will not have the education and training necessary to handle the complex problems seen at CYFD. They recommend putting the emphasis on retention through improved pay, and higher per diem reimbursement for travel.

The New Mexico Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) also opposes the bill because it lessens the standards for social work. In addition, they fear New Mexico may be subject to increased liability due to unqualified individuals making errors in difficult cases. In addition, they express the opinion that the bill will actually make recruitment of social workers more difficult because it will reduce the professional stature of the agency. NASW recommends that additional compensation and improved working conditions are keys to retention. NASW representatives identified inadequate supervision, need for additional client service agents to relieve social workers of administrative duties, and a more user-friendly data entry system as keys to better retention.

The Department of Social Work at Western New Mexico University is concerned that relaxing the licensure requirements will negatively impact their program. They recommend that CYFD concentrate on resolving recruitment and retention issues without amending the SWPA.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

CYFD has submitted an output measure on the turnover rate for social worker classification. Their goal is to reduce the rate from 28.1 percent in fiscal year 2000 to 20.0 percent by the end of fiscal year 2002.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

If this bill is enacted, CYFD would need to develop procedures on the use of individuals performing social work without licensure. Additional training, closer supervision, and assistance to these individuals would be required.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. How will the agency ensure that individuals hired without social worker degrees are assigned to cases that their training qualifies them to handle?
2. Lack of effective supervision was cited by NASW as one of the reasons that social workers leave CYFD. If this is the case, how will these same supervisors be able to effectively manage individuals with less training than social workers currently employed?
3. If this bill is not enacted, what other proposals does CYFD have for alleviating the vacancy shortage and reducing the turnover rate of social workers?
4. What is CYFD's long-range plan, beyond the two-year wavier to the SWPA, for resolving social worker recruitment and retention problems?

GAC/prr:ar