

**Senate Finance Committee
March 6, 2020**

**Senate Bill 693: State Personnel - Maryland Department of Health –
Pay Rates and Staffing Requirements**

****Support****

Maryland's Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers urges your support for House Bill 693: State Personnel - Maryland Department of Health - Pay Rates and Staffing Requirements. This bill is intended to boost the pay rate for several classifications of employees working for the Maryland Department of Health in facilities serving a predominantly forensic population. These facilities are notoriously risky for direct service employees, and costly staff turnover leads to discontinuity in treatment, inadequate staffing patterns, and difficulty with recruitment. More adequate compensation is intended to both attract and retain qualified individuals for these positions, leading to better retention, a safer work environment, and improved services.

Among the employees included in the bill are those in the Social Work classification, a profession which requires a master's degree in social work and a license. Social workers are chronically underpaid, and between salaries being frozen for many years and few cost of living adjustments budgeted for state employees, salaries have lagged behind. Today a social worker employed with the state – with a graduate degree and license – can anticipate a starting salary of only \$20.28/hour. By way of comparison, a Lottery Representative I – a lottery sales position - requiring a high school degree or GED, can anticipate a starting salary a mere \$2.70/hr. lower than that of a starting social worker with an MSW and license.

These social workers, and their co-workers who work as building security attendants; licensed practical nurses; psychologist associates; psychologists; and direct care assistants, are engaged in the serious business of providing care for involuntary psychiatric patients whose behavioral health complications may be characterized by impulsive and assaultive behavior. Given the challenges of providing safe and stable care and the critical importance of the work, boosting salaries by two pay grades is a start to remedying the challenges in hiring and retaining the kind of quality staff that is essential to serving the state's most complex psychiatric population.

In summary, we ask for a favorable report for Senate Bill 693. More adequate compensation will help to stabilize the direct care workforce, reduce the enormous cost of turnover, and strengthen patient care.

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