**SB 1796 (Menéndez) / HB 4678 (Bryant)**

would establish a social work recruitment and retention program with stipend funds to be overseen by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Under this program, THECB would administer Social Work Intern Practicum Stipends (SWIPS) to Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited institutions for distribution to eligible undergraduate and graduate-level social work students as compensation for their 400–500-hour practicum. The legislation creates a pipeline workforce program to mitigate the social work workforce shortage by increasing accessibility to social work degrees and careers.

**Quick Facts**

- In a 2018 study, 83% of social work student participants were employed alongside their practicum and 45% worked over 30 hours per week as a full-time employee.¹
- A 2020 survey on Social Work Programs found that 70% of baccalaureate social work graduates and 73% of master’s graduates have educational debt.²
- Texas ranks in the top five states with the most severe social work shortages projected for 2030, with an anticipated deficit of 33,825 professionals.³

Stipends shall be awarded to students in amounts equal to:

- $6,000 for a maximum of 400 hours of supervised Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to a rate of $15 per hour.
- $9,000 for a maximum of 450 hours of supervised Master of Social Work (MSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to a rate of $20 per hour.

In the case of limited funds, priority consideration shall be given to students and/or institutions with high percentages of students who are:

- Identified as qualifying for need-based aid from an assessment of their financial circumstance as determined by Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) indicators.
- Completing practicums at placements in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA) as determined by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

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Background

Social work practicums are uniquely intense 400–500 hour internships that are required for students to obtain their degree. Practicums are a critical component of social work education as they allow students to uncover their passions, apply classroom skills in the field, and build their own career paths while in school. These students have completed coursework and received training to deliver necessary community services across a variety of areas including healthcare, education, criminal justice, immigration, and child welfare. However, these spaces within the public service sector are already chronically underfunded and, as a result, field sites are generally unable to provide compensation. Social work students are often forced to take on additional debt and risk compromising their employment stability, academic achievement, family responsibilities, and mental or even physical health. The culmination of this issue results in stunted workforce development for social work in Texas and contributes to the already measurable shortage of professional social workers and mental health providers nationwide. Some states have created practicum compensation programs in an effort to combat this workforce crisis.

Relevance

This initiative is connected to several priorities that were outlined for the 88th Legislature. The Senate Special Committee to Support All Texans, formed in acknowledgment of the tragedy at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, confirmed the shortage of social workers and other mental health professionals in its Interim Report. Multiple subject matter experts in mental health expressed the need to create paid internship opportunities for social work students to build a sustainable workforce. Notably, the committee provided the following recommendation:

“Paid Fellowship and Internship Opportunities:
The Legislature should support mental health professionals in their career by offering paid-internships and fellowships for licensed professional counselors and social workers. Increasing the number of mental health providers will require an increase of providers across the spectrum - not just psychiatrists but also psychologists, social workers and counselors. Texas has a compelling interest in assisting providers to reach their pinnacle of their ability to practice independently by offsetting the cost of supervision.”


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