Compensating Social Work Student Practicums

Background
Social work practicums/internships are uniquely intense 400–550-hour internships required for bachelor's and master's students. These students deliver necessary community services, including healthcare, education, criminal justice, immigration, and child welfare. The social service organizations hosting interns are often underfunded, and field sites are generally unable to provide compensation. Students are often obligated to take on additional debt, compromising their employment stability, academic achievement, family responsibilities, and mental and physical health.

This issue has resulted in stunted workforce development for social work in Texas and contributes to the measurable shortage of professional social workers and mental health providers nationwide. To address this issue, many states have created practicum compensation programs.

Federally Designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas

Key Statistics

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<th>Statistics</th>
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<td>83% of social work students are employed outside their practicum, with 45% employed for 30 or more hours per week</td>
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<td>70% of bachelor's graduates and 73% of master's graduates have educational debt</td>
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<td>By 2030, Texas is anticipated to have a social worker deficit of 33,835 professionals, which is in the top five most severe social work shortages projected for 2030</td>
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Increasing Need for Compensation
The rising cost of living has significantly impacted social work students, as evidenced by a 2023 survey conducted among students at UT Austin. The survey revealed that four out of five students expressed distress regarding their ability to meet monthly expenses. This financial strain discourages prospective students from entering the field, exacerbating the existing shortage of social workers and mental health providers in Texas.

Legislative History
NASW-TX introduced HB 4678 during the 88th Legislature, which would have established the Social Work Intern Practicum Stipend Program (SWIPS).

SWIPS would have instituted a social work recruitment and retention program with stipend funds overseen by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to be distributed to eligible undergraduate and graduate-level social work students as compensation for their 400–550 hour practicum.

Under the proposed SWIPS Program, students would have been awarded:
- $6,000 for 400 hours of supervised Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to $15 per hour.
- $9,000 for 450 hours of supervised Master of Social Work (MSW) field hours as required by CSWE, equivalent to $20 per hour.

Priority consideration would be given to students who:
- Qualify for need-based aid based on FAFSA indicators.
- Complete practicums in Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA) designated by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).


For more information or to get involved, please contact:
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