

New York Public Welfare Association

**NYPWA Testimony for the
NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Labor
NYS Assembly Subcommittee on Emerging Workforce**

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The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) represents all fifty-eight local departments of social services statewide and provides information, policy analysis, and assistance to state and local policymakers and technical support to local districts. The NYPWA is dedicated to effective social services administration to enhance the quality of life in our communities while ensuring accountability for the use of public funds.

When hard times strike, it is often said that all roads lead to the local social services office. When a struggling family is without a home, food, heat, childcare, support, or health insurance—they turn to the local Department of Social Services (LDSS). When a call is made regarding suspected abuse or neglect of a child or adult, or when supportive services are needed, it is a local DSS caseworker who goes out into the community to provide pivotal services to those who need it most.

Local social services districts, on both the public benefits side (Temporary Assistance, SNAP, HEAP) and the services side (Child Welfare, Child Care, Adult Protective Services), are struggling with crippling turnover rates, resignations, unfilled vacancies, and a lack of applicants. This mirrors issues facing other employers; however, New York State depends on LDSS workers to provide access to the State's array of public benefits and services. In turn, counties depend on the State to provide the funding, resources, and regulatory flexibility needed to carry out this important work.

As you know, local districts must implement policies mandated by State and federal laws. Existing policies, regulations, and funding directed at social services districts are driven by State policies and budget decisions. These decisions have a direct impact on a local district's ability to recruit and retain a quality workforce. The following recommendations represent actions the State could take to help alleviate dangerous workforce shortages at the local DSS level:

- 1) Modernize Civil Service so that it can respond to an evolving workforce. Job qualifications and testing have not kept up with the pace of change. For example, Competitive Training & Experience exams are needed for DSS and caseworker positions.
- 2) Restore the State share of administrative funding for the Safety Net Assistance (SNA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These funds were cut in 2011—creating a long-term impact on revenue available to cover local DSS staff wages.
- 3) Raise administrative funding for temporary assistance staff by updating the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) Block Grant. State administrative dollars were folded into this fund, but the fund is capped and has never increased—keeping wages stagnant.
- 4) Direct the State to cover the cost of the legal settlement that NYS OCFS agreed to on increasing payments to foster care and adoptive parents. In the SFY 2023 State Budget, these costs were shifted onto counties—taking away fiscal resources districts could have otherwise directed toward employee recruitment/retention.

In closing, we commend the NYS Assembly Labor Committee and Subcommittee on Emerging Workforce for demonstrating its strong leadership in seeking policy solutions to these challenging workforce issues. We offer our ongoing support and expertise on behalf of local departments of social services across the State of New York.

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