STATE OF NEW YORK

7948--A

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

April 16, 2025

Introduced by M. of A. LAVINE -- read once and referred to the Committee on Higher Education -- recommitted to the Committee on Higher Education in accordance with Assembly Rule 3, sec. 2 -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to state aid for library social work services; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon the expiration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Legislative intent. It is the intent of this legislature to place social workers in libraries to assist people who need access to greater resources and social services assistance than what is currently available at a library without a social worker. Libraries are friendly, hospitable, and restful public spaces where people from a wide variety of backgrounds and all walks of life gather to learn, connect with others, and rest. Libraries provide an essential public good by connecting communities with opportunities to upskill, seek education, and learn about resources to support basic needs.

People view libraries as safe spaces for rest and learning, where they can receive vital services for free. Libraries offer respite for all community members, including the most vulnerable in our communities. This includes those who are unhoused, those who cannot afford to cool their homes during the summer, and those without broadband internet access. As such, libraries are often the first to identify emerging community issues as residents seek guidance and help from the library.

Many library patrons have needs that cannot be met by existing library resources. Many needs extend beyond the scope of work of librarians, who despite their best intentions to serve, are not trained nor equipped to meet the wide range of social services challenges being faced by patrons. These needs include housing assistance, mental health

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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services, and help accessing other social services. The co-location of social workers in libraries connects people who need assistance with the workers who can help them. Placing social workers in libraries will increase access to social services for those who need it the most and will ensure better community health and wellbeing.

Furthermore, by creating dedicated funding for library social workers, libraries can serve the social services needs of the community without having to pull funding from other vital services such as buying books, developing programming, and maintaining the upkeep of their library buildings.

§ 2. The education law is amended by adding a new section 273-b to read as follows:

§ 273-b. State aid awards for library social work services. 1. Subject to appropriation, the commissioner shall establish a pilot program for the purpose of placing social workers in public libraries, association libraries and public library systems located in economically disadvantaged communities to assist people who need access to greater resources and social services. Such pilot program shall be implemented for a period of three years.

2. (a) Upon approval by the commissioner, grants shall be made to public libraries, association libraries and public library systems that are located in or contain an economically disadvantaged community to be used for:

(i) the payment of social workers or social worker supervisors with responsibilities and duties as described in subdivision five of this section, or;

(ii) the payment of local departments of social services or not-for-profit organizations which contract with such public libraries, association libraries, or public library systems to provide social workers or social worker supervisors with responsibilities and duties as described in subdivision five of this section.

(b) Such grants shall be awarded to public libraries, association libraries or public library systems within the limits of funds appropriated therefore, through a competitive process.

(c) Awards shall be provided for expenses incurred pursuant to paragraph (a) of this subdivision for the purpose of providing social work services pursuant to subdivision five of this section during the period commencing July first and ending June thirtieth for up to three years.

3. (a) Each application that requests a social worker or requests to contract with a local department of social services or not-for-profit organization which can provide such social worker or that requests a social worker supervisor or requests to contract with a local department of social services or not-for-profit organization which can provide such social worker supervisor shall include, but not be limited to:

(i) a demonstration that resources are or shall be available to provide for maximum utilization of the grant if approved;

(ii) a demonstration that such grant would enhance community building and expand access to social services as a consequence of approval;

(iii) documentation demonstrating how the award will address the service needs of one or more economically disadvantaged communities. Such documentation may demonstrate need, including, but not limited to, poverty rates, concentrations of English language learners, low high school graduation rates, limited fiscal capacity or other relevant factors; and

(iv) such other information as may be required by the commissioner.

(b) No single public library or association library building shall be the subject of more than one approved application pursuant to this subdivision at one time.

(c) Applications that request a social worker or request to contract with a local department of social services or not-for-profit organization which can provide such social worker shall be submitted to the commissioner by a public library system on behalf of a public library or association library for the commissioner's review and approval.

(d) Applications that request a social worker supervisor or request to contract with a local department of social services or not-for-profit organization which can provide such social worker supervisor shall be submitted to the commissioner by a public library, association library, or public library system for the commissioner's review and approval.

4. The commissioner shall determine award amounts per library, association library and library system for awards that are applied for and approved.

5. (a) Public libraries, association libraries and public library systems awarded grants pursuant to this section shall ensure that social workers operating under such award shall perform social work services for members of the public who attend such public library, association library and public library systems. Social work services shall be defined by the commissioner in accordance with article one hundred fifty-four of this chapter.

(b) Public libraries, association libraries and public library systems which receive grant fund awards shall ensure that social worker supervisors operating under such grant awards shall oversee every social worker in the jurisdiction of the public library system through the grant program.

6. Any funds made available pursuant to this section which by April first of each succeeding fiscal year are declined by such public libraries, association libraries or public library systems for any reason, or which cannot otherwise be used by such public libraries, association libraries or public library systems for any reason, shall be made available by the commissioner to other public libraries, association libraries and public library systems that are located in or contain an economically disadvantaged community.

7. The commissioner shall, in consultation with the president of the state civil service commission, if necessary, adopt rules and regulations as are necessary to carry out the purposes and provisions of this section.

8. The commissioner shall submit to the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly an annual report describing those public libraries, association libraries and public library systems that have received state funding and the communities to be served by those awards. Such annual report shall include the effectiveness of each approved award, the number of persons assisted by an award's social work services, the type, scope, and practices of such services offered by each approved award and recommendations for the expansion of the social work services program to all public libraries, association libraries and public library systems in the state, including specific actionable items. The commissioner shall require all awardees to submit to the department such information necessary for the effectuation of such annual report.

§ 3. This act shall take effect on the ninetieth day after it shall have become a law and shall expire and be deemed repealed three years after such date.