STATE OF NEW YORK

5494

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

February 21, 2025

Introduced by Sen. BYNOE -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Libraries

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. 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. 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. State aid shall be provided for social work services awards, pursuant to subdivision five of this section, for salary and fringe benefits of social workers and social worker supervisors, with responsibilities and duties as detailed in subdivision six of this section, in public libraries and public library systems that are located in or contain an economically disadvantaged community, of such public libraries and library systems chartered by the regents of the state of New York or established by an act of the legislature, upon approval by the commissioner. The term social work services shall be defined by the commissioner in accordance with article one hundred fifty-four of this chapter. The state liability for aid awards paid pursuant to this section shall be limited to funds appropriated for such purpose. Awards shall be provided on approved expenses incurred during the period commencing July first and ending June thirtieth for up to three years; provided, however, that such award shall be payable to each public library upon approval of the application by the department in a manner that ensures award effectiveness over a three year period.

3. Each single social work services award application for state aid allocated under this section that requests a social worker shall be submitted by the board of trustees of the public library responsible for the operation of such social work services award to the commissioner for the commissioner's review and approval, after having been reviewed and approved by the governing board of the public library system of which such public library is a member. Each single social work services award application requesting a social worker shall:

a. demonstrate that resources are or shall be available to provide for maximum utilization of the social work services award if approved;

b. demonstrate that such social work services award would enhance community building and expand access to social services as a consequence of approval;

c. be limited to one award concerning such social work services, provided that no single public library building shall be the subject of more than one single submitted or approved application at one time;

d. contain 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

e. provide such other information as may be required by the commissioner.

4. Each single social work services award application for state aid allocated under this section that requests a social worker supervisor shall be submitted by the public library system. The public library system shall be responsible for managing all social worker supervisors and shall enter into cost sharing agreements with public libraries, if

such agreement would be effective and better effectuate the award requirements as detailed in subdivisions two and three of this section. Each award application requesting a social work supervisor shall be approved by the board of trustees of each participating library and library system responsible for the operation of such social work services award application. Social work services award applications requesting a social work supervisor shall be submitted to the commissioner for the commissioner's review and approval, after having been reviewed and approved by the governing board of the public library system of which such libraries are members. Each social work award application requesting a social work supervisor shall:

a. demonstrate that resources are or shall be available to provide for maximum utilization of the social work services award if approved;

b. demonstrate that such social work services award would enhance community building and expand access to social services as a consequence of approval;

c. be limited to one award concerning such social work services, provided that no single public library building shall be the subject of more than one single submitted or approved application at one time;

d. contain 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

e. provide such other information as may be required by the commissioner.

5. The commissioner shall determine award amounts, including salary and fringe benefit packages, for social workers and social worker supervisors based on average salaries per region, for the maximum award per library and library system for awards that are applied for and approved.

6. a. Public libraries with approved social work services awards shall ensure that social workers operating under such award shall perform social work services for members of the public that attend such public library.

b. Public library systems who receive grant fund awards shall ensure that social worker supervisors, employed by the system, operating under such grant awards shall oversee every social worker, employed by the public library in the jurisdiction of the public library system through the grant program.

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

8. 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.

9. The commissioner shall submit to the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly an annual report describing those social work services awards 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 and public library systems in the state, including specific actionable items. The commissioner shall require all social work services awardees to submit to the department such information necessary for the effectuation of such annual report.

§ 2. 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.