

National Association of Social Workers, Colorado

In support SB18-024: Expand Access to Behavioral Health Providers
From: Opioid and Other Substance Use Disorders Interim Study

From Brianna Meehan, NASW-CO Southeastern Region Co-Representative (Elect):

"The Colorado Health Service Corps CHSC scholarship program has kept me working in Pueblo, a city I had planned to stay in for only a couple of years, but has in turn, grown on me and become my permanent home... I already know what school my future children will attend in Pueblo. Through fulfilling my CHSC contract, I have become so attached not only to not my agency (Colorado Mental Health Institute, Pueblo, i.e. "Pueblo State Hospital"), but my rural Pueblo community."

From Kate Niles, NASW-CO Southwest Region Board Representative:

"Expanded loan forgiveness would be extremely beneficial in Southern Colorado, home of the only Indian reservations in the state (Ute Mtn and Southern Ute), which also has extremely high SUD use. With loan forgiveness, social workers can stay gainfully employed in Southern Colorado working in the area of Opioid and other Substance Use Disorder treatment.

More loan forgiveness opportunities across provider settings would create additional competition and better work environments, which would give rise to less staff turnover and more longevity in the community. One of the chief complaints from clients in rural settings is the lack of consistency in providers. We would speculate that such turnover also results in less effective treatment.

In Southern Colorado, the issues of Substance Abuse Disorders and suicide are intertwined. In order to reduce suicides and accidental overdoses, loan forgiveness in order to keep a consistent, well-trained work force is a great way to get more boots on the ground."

From NASW-CO Mountain Region Board Representative Angela VanSchoick:

"As someone who graduated from social work school with a lot of student loan debt, having a way for loan forgiveness would be EXTREMELY helpful for those looking for full-time work. My monthly loan payment was at least \$650 a month after refinancing/consolidating undergraduate and graduate loans. It's quite difficult to have, what was then, more than my monthly rent spent on student loan payment - it didn't leave a lot of money for food, clothing, etc. With that debt, living in high-cost areas such as Summit County, there really is no incentive to go a low-paying social work position; instead you're going to try and find a job so that you don't end up in further debt rather than pursue what you went to school for. Loan forgiveness will help us obtain and retain skilled workers in those areas, such as mountain communities, that need them the most!"

From NASW-CO President-Elect Felicidad X. Fraser-Solak

“Rural communities do not have the convenience of population, so they are subject to whatever services are available; however, they deserve SUD services and assistance, with the guidance and support of social workers. One way to incentivize social workers to rural and underserved areas is to offer loan forgiveness, which has been effective in drawing fire fighters, police, and teachers to underserved communities. The social worker wears many hats when working with the community/clients; we are the first line of defense for those in need, in helping them to rebuild, and get back to being part of the community again. I know of MANY social workers who feel trapped in the metro area, who want to move to rural areas to live and serve, but there are limited opportunities out there for them, and more so, limited incentives. The greatest incentive would be loan forgiveness. In light of the cost of education, supervision and professional development, social workers would be very motivated by loan forgiveness that offsets their financial burden while serving and being part of rural and under-served communities.”

From NASW-CO Southeast Region Board Representative David Petersen:

“Clinically trained behavioral social workers gird the significant efforts of certified addictions counselors, and link integrated care in Colorado efforts to reduce opioid, methamphetamine and other substance consumption in rural areas. Western Slope and Eastern Plains areas are part of Colorado's treasures that require labor, and, currently, their labor force requires extra SUD-related care. This loan forgiveness bill would help provide social workers and other health professionals in order to assist in that care.”

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