Position Paper on
Civil Service Reforms to Declassify State Social Workers

The Washington Chapter of the National Association for Social Workers opposes the Civil Service Reforms proposed for 2005 to merge state social workers into either Social Services Case Manager or Mental Health Counselor classifications.

Background:
Driven by a new law (Personnel System Reform Act of 2002) that mandates fewer personnel classifications, the proposed reforms will give managers more discretion to hire employees from a variety of backgrounds into more general job categories. The proposal will eliminate the specific title of Social Worker and place existing employees with that title into one of two broader positions.

The website http://hr.dop.wa.gov/hrreform/classplant.htm for the Department of Personnel (DOP) provides background on these proposed reforms, and states their goals to simplify and modernize their system; to streamline the job classification systems, simplify rules and processes for hiring, promotions, compensation, layoffs, and corrective/disciplinary action, and to support performance-based government. The proposed reforms would “consolidate 2,400 current job classes into broad occupational categories over a five year period, place more focus on key skills and responsibilities of specific positions, and provide flexibility to adapt to changing technology and economic, workforce, citizen, and organizational needs.

Social workers in many state units will be affected: medical and psychiatric social workers at state-funded hospitals such as Western and Eastern State Hospital, University or Washington and Harborview Medical Centers, Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Division of Developmental Disabilities, Division of Juvenile Justice, and others.

Because strong objections have been raised about downgrading professional social workers, the DOP has delayed parts of the reform relating to social workers. The Social Service Counselor/Case Manager grouping is now scheduled for a later implementation (estimated 2007-098 biennium), allowing time for further study and hearings.

Implications:

While these reforms will prevent those without social work educations from calling themselves ‘social workers’, eliminating social worker classifications would effectively downgrade professionally educated social workers and devalue the expertise we bring to working with at-risk vulnerable populations. Social workers with professional educations will be funneled into job classifications with employees with only high school educations or college degrees unrelated to human services, who have risen in the system based on years of service.
The BASW and MSW educations uniquely prepare social workers with specialized knowledge of human services policy and systems, disadvantaged groups, human behavior in the social environment, and diversity issues. In addition, our training insures that we adhere to a clear Code of Ethics, which is client-centered. To obtain a social work license, social workers with graduate degrees must receive two years of post-graduate supervision from another licensed social worker, and enroll in continuing education in order to maintain the license. This education and training provides unparalleled preparation for practice within diverse communities.

The Council on Accreditation, the body setting standards of DSHS, requires that supervisors at DSHS hold masters’ degrees, with MSW being a preferred but not mandated degree. Their standards are not being met, which will place the public at greater risk of poor quality services, fraud, and liability for negligent practice. Social workers with clinical expertise and training should not be supervised by other than similarly trained and educated social workers.

**Proposed Solutions:**
The State DOP is proposing broader categories that allow managers some flexibility in setting their own requirements by setting. We need our own proposals regarding social work classifications in the regulations.

The Social Work classification should be retained for use by those with advanced training in social work, and specific job functions for those with advanced degrees in social work should be created.

Social workers in a variety of state systems are providing input to the Department of Personnel. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has been hosting meetings with social workers concerned about these changes. Eastern State Hospital and Western State Hospital social workers are appealing to keep their designation as psychiatric social workers, and have sent letters to the Department of Personnel outlining their rationale. Social work managers from University Medical Center and Harborview Medical Center have met with University of Washington Human Resources officials to propose a medical or hospital social work category.

Licensure and job classification models are being researched in order to consider a social worker category set with multiple levels, such as BASW, MSW without license, MSW with license, and MSW supervisor.

Glee Palmer-Davis of NASW continues to work with a group negotiating with Uma Ahluwalia of the Department of Children’s and Family Services with DSHS. Social workers in other state settings will organize to define themselves as well.

The State has committed to professionalizing its social workers through use of federal IV-E funds to obtain MSW degrees while employed by the State. SSWLHC and NASW support those new MSWs in negotiating for pay increases and in articulating how their professional skills can be translated into increased and advanced responsibilities. Incentives need to be developed within the State system, across all programs, for those with specialized knowledge to be recognized and compensated accordingly. State matching funds could be added to federal IV-E dollars to increase the resources for training MSWs in Washington.
In response to its poor performance in its federal audit and as part of its settlement of a lawsuit regarding the chronic underfunding of its system, DSHS must find ways to improve outcomes. At this time of greater scrutiny and more accountability for achieving expectations,
Occupational Category: Social Worker Professional

Category Concept
Positions in this category are assigned responsibility for providing professional level social work services in a broad range of settings. These are professional social workers with specialized education and training from Accredited Social Work Programs with progressively independent clinical and job responsibilities, which are closely tied to minimum qualifications and scope of practice defined by licensure. Social Workers may provide services in many state programs, including medical, clinical, psychiatric, school, child and family settings, correctional and rehabilitation settings provided by the designated WA state agency or service provider. Social Workers will provide specialized assessments of individuals, family, group, organization, policies or programs; and may provide or plan interventions via case management or other modality of individual, group, team, family systems or organization. Advanced Practice Social Workers may provide assessments, diagnosis, on going treatment of psychosocial problems or mental disorders as defined by their practice level and Licensure.

Levels:
1. Bachelor Level Social Worker
2. Master’s Level Social Worker
3. Advanced Practice of Senior Social Worker
4. Advanced Practice Social Worker or Supervisor

Detailed Description
Bachelor Level Social Worker (Level 1)

Distinguishing Characteristics
This is the first level of classification for the professional social work series. Positions work under close supervision and typically receive training and instruction in the provision of basic social work services, such as monitoring, advocacy, information and referral, and patient and family education relating to social work case management. All positions at this level receive close, detailed supervision. This position functions in a support role to a Master’s level Social Worker or Social Work team.

Examples of Work
- Under close supervision by a master’s level social worker, assesses for current and anticipated financial and resource needs (i.e., housing, in-home services, food/nutrition programs, prescription drug assistance programs, transportation, caregiver support systems).
- Provides patient and family education relating to community resource programs and criteria via counseling and the creation and provision of written materials.
- Conducts interviews with patients and families to assist in case assessment, formulation and implementation of service plans.
- Reviews community resources to evaluate relevancy and efficacy of programs offered.
- Facilitates placement of clients who are not returning to their own home.
- Identifies and assists with assessment and advocacy needs.
- Maintains case records relevant to client needs and agency standards.
- Advocates for services for patients and families via coordination and communication with internal and external programs.
Minimum Qualifications, Skills and Competencies (Level 1)
A Bachelor’s degree in Social Work from accredited School of Social Work and current registration as a Counselor in Washington State.

Master's Level Social Worker (Level 2)

Distinguishing Characteristics
This is the entry-level position for Master’s degreed social workers. Social Workers at this level provide comprehensive assessment and social work services under limited supervision, assesses and implements social work care plan based on needs identified by the clients and/or the interdisciplinary team. Positions work under scheduled (or ongoing) supervision and exercise judgment and discretion in determining the scope or level of service.

Examples of Work
- Manages a caseload under supervision in agency, hospital, rehabilitation, psychiatric, correctional, or child and family agency setting.
- Provides crisis intervention and counseling in 1:1 or group settings.
- Provides professional social work services including comprehensive assessment, case management, information and referral, patient/client education, and/or counseling to individuals, families and/or groups. This may be specialized in but not limited to medical, disability, school child/family, and correctional or psychiatric settings.
- Evaluates the needs or of individuals, groups and/or families, obtaining psychosocial history, assessing current and future needs, and provides linkages with appropriate psychosocial and health resources.
- May testify in court in regard to and make recommendations to the court, based on their assessment of individual client need.
- May participate as a member of an interdisciplinary team, providing input based on social work assessment and interventions.
- May provide resource advocacy for clients in a variety of settings, criminal, medical, and community programs.
- Reviews efficacy and relevancy of community programs utilized by populations served.
- Participates in case conferences to provide client/child/family education and to review treatment planning.
- Communicates verbally and via documentation relevant social work assessment and intervention activity.
- Utilizes consultation with team or interdisciplinary staff to screen clients for service needs.
- Participates in performance improvement activities.
- Provides education to the interdisciplinary team on the role of social work, psychosocial issues and community resources.

Minimum Qualifications, Skills and Competencies (level 2)
A Master’s degree in Social Work from an accredited School of Social Work and Current Registration as a Counselor in Washington State.

Advanced Practice or Senior Social Worker (Level 3)
Distinguishing Characteristics
This is the advanced or lead social work level in the professional social work series and staff at this level are licensed as Advanced Social Workers and practice social work within the scope defined by RCW 18.225.010. and within the scope of their job responsibilities provide “…the application of social work theory and methods including emotional and biopsychosocial assessment, psychotherapy under the supervision of a licensed independent clinical social worker, case management, consultation, advocacy, counseling and community organization.” Social Workers in this category, typically work under general direction and have responsibility for managing and coordinating the assessments and treatment needs of clients and families. All Social workers at this position require minimal supervision and are frequently called upon to provide work direction and consultation to lower level staff.

Examples of Work
- Independently manages a caseload, within the context of a multidisciplinary team or under adhoc or scheduled supervision/consultation.
- Provides professional social work services including comprehensive assessment, case management, information and referral, patient education, and/or counseling to individuals, families and/or groups.
- Evaluates the needs of individuals, groups and/or families, obtaining psychosocial history, assessing current and future needs, and provides linkages with appropriate psychosocial and health resources.
- Provides counseling or psychotherapy in 1:1 or group settings.
- Can participate as a member of an interdisciplinary team, providing input based on social work assessment and interventions.
- Provides expert consultation to courts or treatment teams based on specialty knowledge and expertise.
- May provide for the client with the broader systems and with community programs.
- May provide expert consultation to community programs or represent their unit in broader institutional or agency committees
- Reviews efficacy and relevancy of community programs utilized by populations served.
- Participates or may lead case conferences to provide client/family education and to review treatment planning.
- Communicates verbally and via documentation relevant social work assessment and intervention activity.
- Documents assessments and interventions per agency standards as well as consultation to interdisciplinary staff to screen patients for service needs.
- Participates in performance improvement activities.
- Provides education to the interdisciplinary team on the role of social work, psychosocial issues and community resources.
- May provide work direction or task supervision of lower level staff
- May train lower level staff.
- May teach students and staff as well as serve as practicum instructor for social work students.

Minimum Qualifications, Skills and Competencies (Level 3)
Master’s degree in Social Work from an accredited School of Social Work and
Current Washington State Social Work licensure at either the advanced or independent level and 2 years relevant experience in the practice setting.

**Advanced Practice Social Worker or Supervisor (Level 4)**

**Distinguishing Characteristics**
This is the expert or supervisory level in the professional social work series are licensed as an Independent Clinical Social Workers and practice social work within the scope defined by RCW 18.225.010. “…Diagnosis and treatment of emotional and mental disorders based on knowledge of human development, the causation and treatment of psychopathology, psychotherapeutic treatment practices, and social work practice as defined in advanced social work. Treatment modalities include but are not limited to diagnosis and treatment of individuals, couples, families, groups, or organizations.” Positions frequently supervise staff and are able to perform functions of lower levels in this series. They will be called upon to give input to the hiring of and recommend on the selection of staff and coordinate the training and development of staff. They are responsible for providing a full range of supervision or consultation to lower level staff. They may evaluate performance and implement plans for corrective action. AND/OR Staff may function as a recognized expert in a distinct specialty.

**Examples of Work**
- Perform all the duties of a Social Worker 3
- Hires and trains new and existing professional staff in the law, policies and procedures governing their job assignments; arranges for formal agency training related to specific job assignments and career development planning; trains staff in gathering accurate and complete information, organizing information and case decision making.
- Provide supervision to social workers preparing for licensure as advanced or independent social workers.
- Schedule and provide task supervision and direction to social workers.
- Develops performance standards for line staff and prepares written performance evaluations.
- Initiates corrective or disciplinary action or gives input to manager per agency policy.
- Assigns prioritizes and reviews work assignments.
- Plan and implement clinical social work programs.
- Plan and/or implement research protocols, studies and projects
- Evaluate research and clinical programs in areas of expertise
- Serve as expert witness in defined area of expertise.
- Consult with social workers and other health care, juvenile justice professionals (on a hospital and community-wide basis) in areas of particular expertise.
- Identify educational needs, plan and implement formal and informal teaching of health care professionals, health sciences student and/or general community
- Represents the agency or institution at interagency meetings and conferences.

**Minimum Qualifications, Skills and Competencies (Level 4)**
Master’s degree in Social Work from an accredited School of Social Work and Washington State Licensure as an Independent Clinical Social Worker Eligible to supervise social workers pursuing licensure and 5 years experience in relevant practice setting.