



March 19, 2020

Co-Chair Representative Paul Holvey

Co- Chair Senator Arnie Roblan

Members of the Interim Special Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response

RE: COVID-19

The National Association of Social Workers- Oregon (NASW-OR) is a chapter of the largest organization of professional social workers in the world, with more than 120,000 members. Social workers are mental and behavioral health care providers dedicated to improving conditions of life in our democratic society through utilization of the professional knowledge and skills of social work.

Social workers serve a wide range of Oregonians, and during this pandemic, will be serving those most at risk of catching COVID-19, like the houseless population. However, we recognize that the services social workers provide their communities are often deemed essential, even during declared states of emergency like this one. Social workers are case managers, community outreach workers, probation officers, juvenile court liaisons, rehabilitation case workers, and many of them also provide addiction services and therapy. Throughout this pandemic, the delivery of these services will need to continue, and with the shortage of behavioral health workers in our state, we are deeply concerned that this outbreak will exacerbate the effects of the shortage of mental health workers both now and in the future.

With COVID-19 putting a pause on major educational institutions, many schools are requiring that their students receive their schooling remotely. However, for social workers that are in the final stages of their degree, this option is not available, as they are required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to complete field hours in person.

As our state and country looks to grapple with this pandemic, it is vital that we work to lift or relax the requirements on these graduating social workers so that they can join the workforce to deliver these essential services, and ensure that our populations that are most at risk get their needs met. If social workers can continue to deliver addiction services, therapy, and other essential services like these to at-risk populations, they will be able to aid our healthcare systems by keeping individuals like this out of the emergency department. Social workers are deeply concerned for our state and want to do our part to aid Oregonians across the state.

Thank you for your consideration,

Delmar Stone, Executive Director

National Association of Social Workers, Oregon Chapter