
CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES IS LOWERING THEIR EDUCATION REQUIRMENTS

Texas has a major issue with its child protective services system. It's grossly under-funded and often locked into crisis mode, with little long term planning and a lack of focus on true outcomes for children in care. And what's the Department's most recent step towards solving the problem? Lowering the requirements for frontline staff in Investigations, Conservatorship, and Family Based Services from a **four-year degree to a high school diploma**. CPS is going backwards, not forwards, and this would give Texas the dubious distinction as the only state that doesn't require a 4 year degree for its caseworkers.

Here's an excellent article from the Dallas Morning News on the issue:

<http://trailblazersblog.dallasnews.com/2016/05/texas-cps-staffing-crisis-has-leaders-pushing-to-hire-caseworkers-without-college-degrees.html/>

Texas needs to be upgrading its degree requirements, and requiring the Department to **hire more social workers**, not bringing on staff that lack the education and skills necessary to work and remain at an extremely stressful job. CPS is doing this to counteract the large losses of experienced workers due to high caseloads and low salary. In effect, the thinking appears to be that **they can keep paying less** if they lower the bar to the applicant pool.

Here's some of the new language that is currently in job descriptions for caseworkers on the DFPS hiring website:

Successful completion of any associated on-line assessment. Child Protective Services Specialist I: Bachelor's degree OR high school diploma with four years of work experience in social, human, or protective services. Examples of relevant work experience in social, human, or protective services include paid or volunteer work within social service agencies or communities providing services to families or other at-risk populations. For each year of relevant work experience, one year of college credit may be substituted and vice versa. For

example, an associate's degree with two years of relevant work experience meets initial selection criteria.

What does volunteer experience mean? Could this be time spent in a daycare? A Crisis Pregnancy Center? We just don't know, but it's very concerning to think that someone with a history of volunteering could be considered for such a complex and often dangerous job.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

We need to raise our voices and tell CPS, the media and our legislators that this is not okay. Hire more social workers and you will increase retention rates and outcomes for kids. Hire less, and you put kid's lives at stake.

There is a one-pager attached that we've been distributing to legislators that you can use for talking points for your letters, testimony, and advocacy.

NASW/TX WANTS YOU TO:

- Attend either (or even better both) of the next Health and Human Services Commission and Department of Family and Protective Services legislative appropriations request hearings in Austin on Wednesday May 25th and Thursday May 26th (details here: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Public_Meetings/Stakeholders/default.asp). The hearing on the 25th is for HHSC, which covers CPS, and the hearing on the 26th is exclusively for DFPS which also covers CPS, so either will get your message across to those who need to hear it. Public testimony is limited to three minutes, but you can tell the leadership at HHSC and CPS that you oppose this step and want to see higher salaries and a greater focus on recruiting social workers.
- Write your legislator (you can find who represents you here: <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.aspx> and then look up their email address here: <https://www.texastribune.org/directory/> - both a physical letter and an email would make a big impact) and tell them that this is not okay. Texas doesn't need to relax the education requirements for caseworkers.
- Write an op-ed or a letter to the editor to your local paper. Explain why you feel this is harmful to the child welfare system, and kids. Explain why social workers are some of the best trained professionals for this work. Share your stories and spread the word.

Let's make this an issue for CPS, and show them that we don't want them further jeopardizing the safety of kids just because they want to pay workers less and relax necessary qualifications that are in place to ensure that only those with the strongest backgrounds work to eradicate abuse and neglect. This is serious, and we need all of your support. If you have any questions or would like feedback or support with your letters and/or testimony please contact Will Francis, LMSW, Government Relations Director at wfrancis@naswtx.org or (512) 474-1454. Thank-you for being a member of NASW, and for helping us as we fight back against harmful policies that put children at risk.

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