



Missouri House of Representatives

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House Acts to Bolster Dwindling Numbers of Needed Social Workers in Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Missouri is in need of more social workers, especially those who help individuals with special needs such a mental illness or developmental or physical disabilities. The state House has acted to help colleges get new social work programs off the ground so that more students can enter that field.

The House voted 148-0 to approve House Bill 1533, which would fix what sponsor Brenda Shields, R-St. Joseph, calls a “chicken or the egg,” type of problem with state law.

A person can only become a social worker if they have received a baccalaureate or master’s degree in social work through a college course that is accredited and approved by the Council on Social Work Education. When a college launches a new social work program it cannot be accredited by the Council until students graduate from it, but students do not want to enroll in a program that cannot offer them the degree they need, in order to begin their career.

This statutory paradox is not only discouraging to students, it has dissuaded institutions from pursuing the creation of new social work curriculums.

HB 1533 would allow individuals to receive a master’s degree from a social work program that is in “pre-candidacy” status with the Committee for Social Workers.

“This will allow the Council on Social Work Education to monitor and follow the program closely, and then the Board of Social Work will give approval for the student to take their boards. With the passage of the test, the student will be able to practice, under supervision, until the program from which they graduated receives full accreditation. Then the student will retroactively receive their full license.” Shields explained.

Shields led an array of bipartisan supporters and co-sponsors who said this legislation could go a long way to help Missourians who have great need, and often have to wait to receive help.

“Fixing this problem will have ripple effects throughout our state, including by increasing access to things like mental health care for Missourians who might otherwise go untreated,” Shields said.

“This is another instance in which the House is stepping up to change a seemingly simple contradiction in Missouri laws that is having a significant detrimental effect to citizens in all walks of life, and to young people who just want to begin their careers,” said House Speaker Dean Plocher, R-Des Peres.

HB 1533 now goes to the Senate for its consideration.

Representative Brenda Kay Shields, a Republican, represents part of Buchanan County (District 11) in the Missouri House of Representatives. She was elected to her first two-year term in November 2018. For more information, please contact Rep. Shields’ office at 573-751-3643 or by email at Brenda.Shields@House.Mo.Gov.

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