

MEMO



Senate of Pennsylvania

December 1, 2010

TO: ALL SENATORS

FROM:

Stewart J. Greenleaf

Stewart

SUBJECT: Co-sponsorship -- **Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness Act**

I am reintroducing **Senate Bill 40**, the Child Welfare Workers Loan Forgiveness Act, establishing a loan forgiveness program for members of the child welfare workforce who have qualified outstanding loan balances and have at least an undergraduate degree.

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 90% of the states reported having difficulty recruiting and retaining child welfare workers. The reason cited was the low salary for workers in this field. The salaries average \$33,000 annually for public child welfare workers and \$27,000 for private workers. Given the limited number of child welfare workers, those working in the field also experience large caseloads, averaging 24 to 31 children at a time.

In addition to a demanding work environment, studies show that child welfare workers are also exposed to violence. Seventy percent of caseworkers have been victims of violence or have received threats of violence. Recognizing that the salary for child welfare workers is low and the nature of the job is demanding, many college graduates choose not to enter this field. Only 28% of child welfare workers have undergraduate or masters degrees according to one publication.

My legislation provides loan forgiveness to qualified child welfare workers for outstanding loans they incurred while obtaining a graduate or undergraduate degree. The program forgives a maximum amount of \$10,000 for workers with an undergraduate degree and \$20,000 for workers with a graduate degree. Any loan forgiveness will be spread out over a minimum period of four years, depending on the amount of funds available for the program.

The primary purpose of the program is to attract capable and promising students to the child welfare profession, and increase employment and retention of individuals who are working towards or who have received either a bachelor's degree or master's degree in social work or any human services subject area that qualifies the individual for employment as a family services worker. The legislation also gives an extra incentive by offering more forgiveness to those who obtain a graduate degree in addition to an undergraduate degree.

This bill is modeled after a Florida law and is similar to loan forgiveness programs in existence for other professions.

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the NASW supports this legislation.

If you would like to cosponsor this legislation, please contact Pat Snively of my office by e-mailing her at psnively@pasen.gov.