

November 29, 2021

The Honorable Representative Michael J. Finn
House Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Senator Adam Gomez
Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and
Persons with Disabilities

Dear Chair Finn, Chair Gomez, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of over 60 private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth, and families. It is through public education and advocacy that CLM promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services.

We are writing to testify **in support of An act relative to fair pay for comparable work** (H.237/S.105). During the current workforce crisis, a commonsense fix is to eliminate the existing pay disparity between the salaries of human services workers employed by community-based human service providers and state employees holding similar job titles who perform similar work.

While the Commonwealth is the largest purchaser of human services from community-based human services nonprofits, the model budgets created by the Commonwealth for human services programs contain salaries that are far lower than what the state pays for similar positions. Due to this salary disparity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for community-based organizations to recruit and retain qualified workers in the sector, which has nearly 180,000 jobs.

Further, this bill addresses the pervasive and persistent pay disparities of working women and people of color—eighty percent of the human services workforce is female. Low pay rates mean that many human service workers themselves become reliant on other state support to address issues like housing and food insecurity; 1 in 8 are living below 150% of the federal poverty level, unable to sustain a household on a community-based salary.

In a recent survey of our members, CLM found that these pay disparities are a top cause of people leaving our workforce: *“Clinical staff are leaving for higher paying opportunities in school systems and other state funded settings that also provide more flexible summer schedules.”*



The pandemic has only heightened the need to address this disparity. Consider this anecdote from one of our members, whose state contract dictates that their staff are compensated at a lower rate than state workers who were exempted from in-person work during the height of the pandemic:

"We have not lost a single staff as a result of COVID other than concern for family members that were medically compromised. All staff unselfishly worked with youth throughout the pandemic, remaining dedicated to the mission of the agency and program. We have several staff step up and volunteer to take care of COVID positive youth, quarantining at the program at the expense of their own families. They did this without complaint or without any expectation of additional compensation or recognition."

Community-based staff take on the hardest cases, spent the entire pandemic working in person, and provide care 24/7 to the Commonwealth's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. Yet the state sets their rates, assigns their cases, and competes for their workers. Without a solution to this workforce pay imbalance, an increasing number of jobs will go unfilled and programs may close, leading to a reduction in the quality and availability of mental health, behavioral health, residential care, and other critical services for vulnerable Massachusetts residents.

We ask that you recognize this commonsense solution to our ongoing workforce crisis and vote this bill out favorably and work diligently for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tammy Mello". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Tammy Mello
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts