PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS & PROFESSIONALS RALLY,
RELEASE SALARY SURVEY AND CALL FOR LOAN FORGIVENESS

Trenton, New Jersey: Hundreds of social work students, professionals and educators rallied on
the statehouse steps to call on lawmakers to re-fund the Social Services Student Loan
Redemption Program. The program, originally authorized in 2005, has been unfunded since
2011.

The rally today comes at the start of National Social Work Month and was organized by the
National Association of Social Workers - New Jersey Chapter (NASW-NJ), an organization that
represents over 23,000 licensed social workers across the state of New Jersey and the hundreds
of thousands of clients and community members they serve on a daily basis.

“Social Workers are on the front lines of every issue our communities face today,” said Jennifer
Thompson, social worker and Executive Director of the organization. “We’re fighting the opioid
crisis, we’re on the front lines of gun violence in schools, we’re helping those with terminal
illnesses and leading envoys to the southern border to help in detention centers,” she added.
“The value of our profession cannot be quantified; our communities would look much different
without social workers.”

According to the 2020 survey conducted by the organization, employment opportunities for
social workers typically require a minimum of a Master’s Degree and clinicians who provide
therapy to clients are required to obtain several additional years of training, supervision and
licensure to practice. “It is not uncommon for social workers to leave school with loan debt
rivaling attorneys,” said Jeffrey Feldman, Director of Advocacy & Communications for NASW-NJ.
Ms. Thompson echoed that, noting “I have a bachelors and master’s degree in social work and
upon graduation, I had amassed over $100,000 in student loans.”
Moreover, while student loan debt rivals that of lawyers and other professionals with advanced degrees, starting salaries are not aligned. “My starting salary was $42,500 in New York City,” Thompson shared. “I still pay roughly $1,000 a month in student loans.”

Thompson’s story is not unique, however. According to the findings of NASW-NJ’s salary survey, it is not uncommon for social workers to seek forbearance for years, work multiple jobs and engage in income-based repayment plans for most of their careers.

Thompson asked the gathered crowd to imagine a day without social workers. “Your child might not have the services they need in school, your aging parent might struggle to transition to assisted living, you might not be able to access patient assistance programs for your medication needs, or be able to find a therapist to talk through pressing issues with,” Thompson said. “Your, my, our collective days would be more difficult. Our communities would suffer without social workers.”

“Today, we are calling on legislators to acknowledge the contributions social workers make to our lives and our communities by funding the Social Services Student Loan Redemption Program in the amount of $750,000 and to commit to annual support of at least that amount,” Thompson said. “It’s the least we can do to limit the crushing impact of student loan debt on those who work daily to help us all succeed.”

For more information, visit www.naswnj.org

About NASW-NJ: The National Association of Social Workers - New Jersey Chapter represents over 23,000 licensed social workers across the state and has nearly 7,000 members making it the second largest state chapter in the nation. The association works to strengthen the social work profession and communities they serve through professional development, advocacy and social justice initiatives.