

# SUPPORT HJR 0053

Protect professional degree status for social work, nursing, counseling & allied health graduate programs  
Illinois House Joint Resolution | 104th General Assembly

**The federal threat:** The One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 eliminated Graduate PLUS loans and created two borrowing tiers. On January 30, 2026, the U.S. Department of Education published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) defining only 11 programs as 'professional' — including medicine and law, but excluding social work, nursing, counseling, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and public health. The public comment period closed March 2, 2026. A final rule is expected in spring 2026 and would take effect July 1, 2026. No final rule has been issued as of Advocacy Day, the window to influence the outcome is still open.

74,000

Annual social worker job openings projected nationally over the next decade (BLS)

295,800

Registered nurse shortage projected in the U.S. as of 2025 (HRSA)

75-85%

Of students in affected fields are women — this is a gender equity issue (NASFAA)

## What the Resolution Does

- Formally declares these degree programs are professional under Illinois law: MSW, DSW, MSN, DNP, LCPC/LPC/LMFT master's, DPT, MOT, OTD, MS-SLP, AuD, MPH, DrPH, and education master's programs
- Directs state agencies and public universities to not discriminate in hiring or pay based on any federal loan classification
- Urges the U.S. Department of Education to expand its professional degree definition
- Urges the Illinois Congressional delegation to advocate for loan access restoration
- Commits to exploring state-level scholarships, grants, and loan repayment solutions

*Cost to pass: zero. This is a resolution — no appropriation required.*

## Why It Matters for Illinois

- Illinois law already requires the MSW for LCSW/LSW licensure, master's degrees for LCPC/LPC/LMFT, and graduate degrees for PT, OT, SLP, and APRN — the same degrees the federal government now proposes to demote
- MSW programs in Illinois cost between \$20,000 and \$104,000 — a \$20,500/year cap covers only a fraction of actual costs at most programs
- Rural, low-income, and underserved communities depend most heavily on these professionals and can least afford a workforce pipeline shrinkage
- 21 CSWE-accredited MSW programs operate in Illinois — reduced enrollment will damage the state's behavioral health workforce for a generation

## The Ask: Please support HJR 0053

Illinois already treats these degrees as professional, our licensing statutes depend on it. The federal government's proposed reclassification contradicts Illinois law, threatens our healthcare and human services workforce, and disproportionately harms women, first-generation students, and underserved communities. This resolution sends a clear, cost-free message: Illinois stands with its licensed professionals.

NASW-Illinois Chapter | [naswil.org](http://naswil.org) | Questions please reach out to Kyle Hillman, Director of Legislative Affairs, 312.435.2100

Sources: One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (P.L. 119-21); U.S. Dept. of Education; NAICU; NASFAA; Fordham University GSS (Feb. 2026); NASW Social Work Blog (Dec. 2025); PBS NewsHour (Dec. 2025); BLS; HRSA; Illinois MSW program data ([mswguide.org](http://mswguide.org); [illinoisocialwork.org](http://illinoisocialwork.org)); HJR 0053 text.