



# **Submission on the Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill**

## **Social Services and Community Committee**

***Submitted by Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (SSPA)***  
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### **Summary of our position on this kaupapa**

1. Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (SSPA) supports this Bill which seeks to delay the repeal of the experience pathway for a further four years to 28 February 2028. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission at the Committee.
2. Since the establishment of the experience pathway under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (as amended by the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019), there have been a number of changes to the social work operating environment, which are salient to the consideration of this Amendment Bill.
3. A change of particular significance is the announcement made by the Government in late 2022 of the pay equity settlement extension for community-based social work roles. Over the past few years too, SSPA member organisations and others working across our community-based social services have faced three years of endurance work. They continue to provide life-changing and often life-saving services and support in their communities and hapori throughout the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now in communities affected by cyclone and flood devastation.
4. In light of the pay equity extension announcement and against a backdrop of ongoing challenges faced by community-based social service organisations, SSPA supports this Bill extending the experience pathway until 2028. We see this as a positive way to continue the ongoing strengthening of Aotearoa New Zealand's social work profession, by recognising experience as a pathway to registration. We believe that receiving the future benefits and opportunities of the pay equity extension may well provide greater impetus for social work kaimahi to take up the experience pathway to registration, including tangata whenua and Pacific kaimahi.
5. SSPA therefore believes it makes good sense to provide this longer timeframe to enable more social workers and tauwhiro to gain registration via the experience pathway. We also see this Bill and its purpose as contributing to further strengthening New Zealand's social services and social sector, for the benefit of kaimahi and the tamariki, rangatahi and whānau who they serve every day.



## **About Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (SSPA)**

6. Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (SSPA) is a membership-based national organisation, comprised of over 200 community-based social service organisations from around Aotearoa New Zealand, based in both rural and urban locations.
7. Among our members are kaupapa Māori and Iwi social service organisations, Pacific providers, region-specific and national social service providers. SSPA members work across the full spectrum of community-based social services with a central focus on supporting the positive outcomes of children, rangatahi, families and whānau.
8. SSPA full members are funded by government to deliver social services in our communities every day, with a predominant focus on children, rangatahi, families and whānau. Our affiliate members are organisations that deliver social services for these people, and organisations and individuals who work in areas aligned to the interests of children, rangatahi, whānau or communities.
9. SSPA's vision is that Aotearoa's community-based social services are sustainable, able to make a positive impact every day in our communities, supporting children, rangatahi and whānau to thrive now and into the future. SSPA works to strengthen Aotearoa's social sector through advocacy and engagement, learning and development, relationships and sector leadership.

## **SSPA supports this Amendment Bill**

### ***Efforts to strengthen the community-based social services sector and social work profession are important***

10. Over the past few years, SSPA has outlined its support for social worker registration and the strengthening of the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, SSPA has made previous submissions to this Select Committee on the kaupapa of mandatory registration, and our recommendations have focused on aspects of the regulation system and process to ensure the community-based social sector can be empowered to meet the needs of those it works alongside; to retain valued and experienced staff who maintain strong relationships and have the trust of their communities; and for organisations to be sustainably funded to reduce the cost burden of any registration system.
11. SSPA has, in our previous submissions, noted a number of barriers to qualification for many currently employed social workers, including the costs of achieving qualifications and making section 13 applications, which were high in relation to the level of wages/salaries that social workers earned, and the time it took to undertake the process. Persistent and long-term underfunding of the sector exacerbated the sector's ability to support kaimahi within these registration and qualifications systems. In the context of a consistently underfunded sector, community-based social service organisations have struggled to fill social worker positions due to a skill shortage and the inability to compete with the salaries offered by government organisations. With social services in continuing demand due to the significant needs of our communities and hapori, this is causing high stress, high workloads and high staff turnover across the community-based social



services sector. These are not matters that can be reflected in the Bill, but which SSPA brings forward into consideration of the Bill, as we believe they provide important context for the Select Committee in its consideration of the current and continuing operating environment, relevant to this Amendment Bill.

***Enabling more time for the experience pathway is crucial given the social work pay equity settlement extension remains forthcoming***

12. The Departmental Disclosure Statement underpinning the Bill demonstrates an understanding of the context in which community-based social workers are currently working and why this amendment should be enacted. SSPA supports the policy intent of the Bill, and has previously confirmed its support with a letter to the Minister for Social Development, noting the likely positive impacts of the extension of the pay equity settlement on the government-funded social service sector, the need to continue the experience pathway to enable this extension to be experienced by social work kaimahi and tauwhiro, and the need to ensure accessible and equitable pathways into the social work sector.
13. The pay equity settlement extension which remains forthcoming for community-based social workers is a significant and historic development – one of the most significant to occur in the community-based social services sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. SSPA has been closely involved in the mahi to inform and enable the extension, in our role as sector coordinator for the community-based social work pay equity claim. We wish to acknowledge the significant work of Te Kawa Mataaho's Pay Equity Team in leading mahi on the extension, and the mahi of Oranga Tamariki, other government funding agencies, and of course the PSA that brought the social work pay equity claim in the first place. SSPA believes the extension, once made, will make a significant difference across the community-based social services and wider social sector, providing more equitable opportunities for social workers and tauwhiro in community-based social work mahi. Given the scope of the pay equity settlement and the associated extension of its benefits to all community-based social work roles remains forthcoming, this Bill presents an opportunity for those social workers and tauwhiro who may have been considering the experience pathway to registration but who have not yet taken this up, to have their skills and experience recognised and attain registration.

***This Amendment Bill will help to strengthen the social work profession and our community-based social services***

14. To summarise, it is SSPA's view that the extension announced by Government of the pay equity settlement for community-based social work roles means that a key factor in the operating context of social workers is going to change – the fact that they will receive equitable pay, recognising and appropriately valuing the mahi that they do. As a result, SSPA believes that this is likely to mean that more tauwhiro who would meet the requirements for social worker registration via the s.13 experience pathway will now be encouraged to actively seek registration through this avenue.



15. SSPA sees this as a very welcome development, given the opportunity it presents, to ensure that the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand is inclusive and continues to be strengthened through the maatauranga, experience and skills of such tauwhiro, including tangata whenua and Pacific kaimahi. Ensuring that the social work profession reflects our communities and hapori, who social workers serve every day – is an important ingredient towards enabling the wellbeing and aspirations of both kaimahi and tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.