

Steve Sisolak
Governor

Richard Whitley, MS
Director



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DIVISION OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
Helping people. It's who we are and what we do.



Ross Armstrong
Administrator

The Honorable Governor Steve Sisolak

Office of the Governor

101 North Carson Street, Suite 1

Carson City, Nevada 89701

November 8, 2021

Dear Governor Sisolak,

The State of Nevada Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) provided their quarterly reports on September 9, 2021, during the scheduled Commission on Behavioral Health meeting. The agencies all shared that they are experiencing significant staffing shortages related to difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff.

DCFS provides services to children, adolescents, and their families. Mental health services include Community-Based Outpatient Services and Residential Services. DCFS Community Services programs include mobile crisis response and stabilization services, community-based mental health therapy, medication management, early childhood day treatment, childcare consultation, and wraparound care coordination services to children and adolescents and their families in Clark and Washoe Counties. Treatment services in these two major urban areas are provided through Southern Nevada Child and Adolescent Services and Northern Nevada Child and Adolescent Services. DCFS Residential Services include Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) in both North and South as well as Desert Willow Treatment Center in Las Vegas, a licensed 32-bed psychiatric hospital accredited by the Joint Commission that provides mental health treatment to children throughout the state.

In DCFS, Mental Health Technicians (MHTs) provide direct client care. Staff are responsible for providing guidance and encouraging client independence and assisting individuals in reaching their full potential, duties include assistance with personal hygiene, household chores, recordkeeping, verbal intervention for clients who are escalating and as necessary, restrain or utilize appropriate behavioral and environmental controls for individuals who are a threat to themselves or others and may be hostile, combative, aggressive or assaultive, they are often exposed to verbal and physical assault by clients.

The annual starting salary for MHTs ranges from \$31,403.52 (pay grade 23) to \$39,943.44 (pay grade 29) depending on years of experience.

Nurses in DCFS are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the nursing care delivered to our adolescent clients. These duties include identifying client health care needs and making comprehensive clinical evaluations, providing input and recommendations regarding nursing care and services, initiate and carry out therapeutic, recreational, educational, social, and physical care activities, as well as administer medications as prescribed by

physicians and monitor patients for medication side effects and/or allergic reactions. Above all, ensure that our programs maintain a safe, healthy, and therapeutic environment for our clients, and nursing care objectives are met in accordance with the nursing association professional standards of practice and consistent with DCFS policy.

The United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov) indicates the projected supply and demand for the Registered Nurse workforce in Nevada for 2025 is a demand of 32,400 with a supply of 24,600 nurses. That is a difference of 7,800 nurses. In addition, according to the 2020-2021 edition of Health Care Careers in Nevada, the average wage for a Registered Nurse is \$41.00 per hour. In contrast, newly hired DCFS nurses are paid at an average of \$36.80 per hour.

This increasing shortage of qualified nurse employees and lack of competitive compensation has directly impacted DCFS. Currently, the Division of Child and Family Services has a vacancy rate of 49% in nursing positions in their mental health programs making it difficult to provide essential programs.

In DCFS, there are many clinical positions that are historically hard to recruit and retain. These positions range from our Mental Health Technicians to Mental Health Counselors, Nurses, Psychologists, and Psychiatrists. DCFS mental health programs has a 35% vacancy rate for direct care staff.

The Nevada State Human Resource Management Division (DHRM) establishes the salary rates for all state positions. The compensation schedules for the positions mentioned in this letter can be found here for reference: https://hr.nv.gov/Sections/Compensation/2021/COMPENSATION_SCHEDULES,_JULY_12,_2021/

The onboarding time frame to hire new staff can vary and can take as long as a few weeks and up to months. Establishing a process to breakdown state personnel human resource barriers will benefit agencies on finding, hiring, and retaining qualified candidates. State frontline clinical staff are being offered less wage than what the private sector would offer, and a more competitive salary may assist with challenges agencies are facing to hire necessary mental health and clinical frontline staff.

Our state's salary cap for front line direct support staff working with children and families is far below salaries offered from many local government or retail industry employers.

To provide support and services to assist Nevada's children and families in reaching their full human potential, the Governor's Commission on Behavioral Health, strongly urge you to raise the state salary caps for our critical front-line staff to match a living wage in accordance with Department of Labor standards, such as that provided by other local employers. In addition, we call for a class and compensation study to be performed by the State DHRM to assess competitiveness across jurisdictions throughout the State of Nevada.

Respectfully,

Commissioner Lisa Durette, M.D., Chair

Commissioner Lisa Ruiz-Lee, Vice Chair

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