

## Legislative Auditor

# OVERVIEW

## STUDY OF THE SOCIAL WORKER SHORTAGE AMONG STATE AGENCIES

Honolulu, Hawaii

February 1990

### Summary

The state has found it increasingly difficult to fill social worker positions. About one-third of the positions were vacant as of October 1989, with critical shortages in the departments of human services, health, and corrections. Agencies have had to rely on emergency hires to maintain

needed services. Sixteen percent of state social workers were emergency hires. Recognizing that a concerted effort is needed in recruiting and retaining social workers, the Legislature requested the auditor to look into the causes of the shortage.

### FINDINGS

*The shortage of social workers is exacerbated by a limited supply of graduates in social work in Hawaii and an increasing demand for social services. The state personnel system has been unable to satisfy the salary concerns of many social workers and the recruitment needs of departments. Agencies and social workers do not agree on what should be the minimum qualifications for social worker positions.*

*The Department of Personnel Services should inform the Legislature of the cost of retraining all professionals in bargaining unit 13. It should review implementation of shortage pay, eliminate the social worker written examination, review whether social workers should remain a benchmark class, and monitor the use of emergency hires. The department should also strengthen its resources to monitor agency implementation of delegated personnel functions.*

*should coordinate their efforts and develop strategies to address the shortage problem. However, the department noted that there is disagreement among departments as to the causes of some of the problems and the corrective actions to be taken.*

*The Judiciary and the University of Hawaii concurred in general with the recommendations. The Board of Regents and the president felt that educational requirements for social work positions should not be downgraded.*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*The University of Hawaii should consider giving the School of Social Work more support to meet the State's demands for social workers.*

*A task force of representatives from the departments of corrections, education, health, human services, and personnel services, the Judiciary, and the University of Hawaii School of Social Work should be established to monitor the shortage and explore ways to maintain social services. Among other matters, it should review the social work classification and determine whether to develop other classifications in the field of human services.*

*The Department of Human Services should take the lead in providing training and promotional opportunities to persons without social work degrees. All agencies should be prepared to assume a greater share of personnel functions delegated by the Department of Personnel Services. They should consider new ways of providing services and using their personnel, and they should take steps to handle stress-related problems.*

*The Department of Personnel Services agreed that the social worker shortage problem is complex. It had numerous comments about statements in the report and raised several concerns. A major concern was that the report seemed to focus on the state personnel system and paid inadequate attention to working conditions and workload. The department did not comment on the specific recommendations of the report. It held that the report did not contain sufficient information on recruitment results and turnover/retention and did not make clear how the recommendations address the causes of the problem.*

### RESPONSE

*The Department of Human Services stated that the report summarized many of the pertinent issues related to the shortage and agreed with our recommendation that state agencies*