

## In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Social Development and Employment  
Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

## Extending the Experience Pathway for Social Worker Registration

### Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement to delay the repeal of section 13 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (SWR Act) from February 2024 until February 2028. This will provide an additional four years for people without prescribed qualifications, but with appropriate practical experience, to register as social workers through the experience pathway.
- 2 I seek approval to progress an amendment to section 2(2) of the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019 (SWRL Act) as a standalone Bill to carry out this delay. I propose this Bill be added to the 2023 Legislation Programme with a category three priority (to be passed if possible before the 2023 general election).

### Relation to government priorities

- 3 Social workers are particularly important for providing services to our most underserved and marginalised people, whānau and communities. Delaying the repeal of the experience pathway supports the Government's wellbeing objective of 'lifting Māori and Pacific people's incomes, skills and opportunities' and aligns with the Government's commitment to strengthen Māori-Crown relations.

### Executive Summary

- 4 Section 13 of the SWR Act provides an alternative pathway for people without an approved social work qualification to apply for social worker registration (the experience pathway). Instead of demonstrating their competence by having a prescribed qualification, these applicants must satisfy the Social Worker's Registration Board (SWRB) of their competence based on their vocational experience.
- 5 The experience pathway is due to be repealed in February 2024. However the sector has undergone significant changes since this was initially proposed. COVID-19 has exacerbated social inequities, creating an increasing demand for social work services which cannot be met by the current workforce and social worker vacancies are growing nationally. The pay equity settlement for social workers across the government-funded sector [SWC-22-MIN-0196 refers] (pay equity extension) has also significant implications for the social sector, including for the experience pathway. This is because it incentivises people doing substantially similar work to social work to apply to register as a social worker.
- 6 I am proposing to amend section 2(2) of the SWRL Act to delay the repeal of the experience pathway until February 2028. This will enable the opportunities presented

by the pay equity extension to be leveraged to strengthen and support a sustainable social work sector. It will also help to address workforce shortages and contribute towards maintaining and developing a diverse and culturally competent workforce.

- 7 Over the last 13 years, 292 people have been registered as social workers through the experience pathway. Most applicants have 15 to 20 years' experience and around one quarter of these people identify as Māori. In 2020, SWRB adapted its experience pathway processes to be more culturally responsive and the number of Māori gaining registration through this pathway has increased over the last two years. The experience pathway is also important for supporting under-represented groups in the profession, for example Pacific Peoples, to register as social workers.
- 8 This proposal is supported by the Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association (Tangata Whenua SWA), Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA), Te Aka Whai Ora, the Ministry of Health and Oranga Tamariki in light of the pay equity extension. It will allow SWRB and its partners to carry out the longer-term strategic work needed to address barriers to entering the profession before the pathway is removed. If Cabinet agrees, I will begin the process for drafting a standalone Bill to be added to the 2023 Legislation Programme as a category three priority (to be passed if possible before the 2023 general election).

## Background

- 9 Social workers provide an essential frontline service to marginalised and underserved communities and a workforce responsive to increasingly complex and diverse needs is crucial. Since 27 February 2021, all people practising as social workers (or representing themselves as social workers) have been required to register with SWRB under the SWR Act. Prior to February 2021, registration was voluntary for people working as social workers with some employers choosing to only employ registered social workers in these roles.
- 10 To be eligible for registration, applicants must have a qualification prescribed under a scope of practice set by SWRB (a prescribed qualification). Section 13 of the SWR Act (section 13) provides an alternative pathway to registration for people with extensive practical experience but without a prescribed qualification (the experience pathway). Social workers applying through this pathway usually have at least 10 to 15 years' vocational experience which is used to demonstrate they meet the professional competency standards set by SWRB.
- 11 In 2017, Cabinet agreed to repeal the experience pathway with a delayed commencement date from the enactment of the SWRL Act [CAB-17-MIN-0234 refers]. This repeal is due to take effect on 27 February 2024 and will remove the ability for people without a prescribed qualification to apply for social worker registration based on their practical experience. Social workers registered under section 13 prior to the repeal date will continue to have their registration recognised.
- 12 The repeal of section 13 was delayed to support the social work sector to transition from voluntary to mandatory registration by allowing unregistered social workers more time to either complete a prescribed qualification or apply to register under section 13. This decision assumed that the supply of social workers would meet future

demand and that five years would be sufficient time for people undertake the steps required to meet registration requirements.

**Social worker registration ensures a high level of public safety**

- 13 Registration provides the basis for determining the safety of social workers to practice, through both the qualification and experience pathways. In particular, the initial competency assessments and fit and proper person tests required for registration, as well as the accountability and oversight mechanisms that come with registration, provide this assurance.
- 14 SWRB's assessment criteria for registration through the experience pathway are:
  - 14.1 enough practical experience to compensate for not having a prescribed qualification – usually around 10 to 15 years,
  - 14.2 demonstrable competence to practise as a social worker, and
  - 14.3 competence in working with Māori and ethnic and cultural groups more broadly.
- 15 All applicants for registration (whether they have a prescribed qualification or are using the experience pathway) must also pass the fit and proper test to practise as a social worker. There is no evidence to suggest that experienced social workers without a prescribed qualification who otherwise meet SWRB's registration requirements are less safe, competent, or professional than academically qualified social workers. For example, there is no evidence to suggest a disproportionate number of social workers registered through the experience pathway end up in disciplinary processes, when compared to those registered with a prescribed qualification.

**The social work sector has undergone significant changes since the original decision to repeal section 13**

- 16 The previous decision to remove the experience pathway was based on the view that professionalisation of social workers would be accomplished by emphasising and standardising the workforce through academic achievement. This was underpinned by an assumption that there would be sufficient supply to meet future demand for social workers.
- 17 Since the SWRL Act was passed, there have been several changes in the social work sector's environment, which have contributed to a reconsideration of the value and use of the experience pathway.

*Workforce supply of social workers is not meeting current demand and trends are expected to continue*

- 18 COVID-19 has exacerbated social inequities, creating an increasing demand for social work services which cannot be met by the current workforce.

- 19 Social worker vacancies are growing nationally. Indicative data from SWRB's 2022 annual workforce survey suggests an estimated shortfall of around 700 social workers. The survey data also indicates that a significant number of social workers are planning to reduce their hours or leave the workforce in the next five years, with retirement being the most common reason.
- 20 In addition, the number of people studying to become social workers is decreasing which is reducing the pipeline of new entrants into the workforce. From 2015 to 2020 there was a 20 percent reduction in learners enrolling in prescribed social work qualification courses. Further, SWRB report that only 55 percent of students starting a Bachelor of Social Work Degree continue into their fourth year of study. These factors make it difficult to address existing and future workforce gaps.
- 21 Repealing the experience pathway in February 2024 will further limit the pipeline of social workers into the workforce and is likely to exacerbate workforce shortages in coming years.

*The pay equity extension creates opportunities for the sector through the experience pathway*

- 22 In November 2022 Cabinet agreed to extend the social worker pay equity settlement across the government-funded sector [SWC-22-MIN-0196]. This provides a financial incentive for people to register as social workers, and presents an opportunity to increase the quality and safety of social services more broadly. Delaying the removal of the experience pathway will support the social sector to transition to this major shift in its operating environment.
- 23 The pay equity extension will apply to non-government organisations (NGOs) receiving funding from government agencies for social work services. New pay rates are not expected to be implemented before August 2023. The pay equity extension will lift the pay of around 5,000 employees. This is likely to create an incentive for people doing substantially similar work to social workers to apply for higher paying social worker roles. They will need to be registered to work in these roles and this is likely to drive an increase in demand for the experience pathway over the coming years.
- 24 The pay equity extension also helps to correct disparities in access to professional development between government and NGO employees and removes some of the cost barriers of maintaining registration. The extension includes payment for annual practising certificates, professional development and supervision costs. These costs can prohibit a social worker's ability to maintain their mandatory annual practising certificate. Covering these costs for eligible employees makes ongoing registration more accessible and attractive, while also working to address some of the workforce supply issues faced by employers.
- 25 Sector representatives have reported that to compensate for social worker recruitment and retention difficulties, some employers are changing job titles and/or altering job descriptions to no longer require registered social workers (for roles that would normally require one). However, the implementation of the pay equity extension may significantly reduce this practice as social work roles will be defined by the work that people are required to do in these roles rather than by the job title.

- 26 As social worker registration is not required for people working in roles substantially similar to social work, there are likely to be many experienced practitioners working in these roles who do not have a prescribed qualification but otherwise meet SWRB’s competency and fitness to practice criteria. Continuing to offer the experience pathway temporarily would enable these experienced people to register as social workers. It would enable them to continue to support their communities, while also increasing the proportion of social sector workers overseen by SWRB. It could help to improve the quality of social services more broadly and ensure public safety through including them under existing regulation and accountability settings.

**The experience pathway also supports Māori with vocational experience to become registered social workers**

- 27 The experience pathway supports a diverse range of people to enter the social work profession, including Māori who have gained their skills through extensive practical experience.
- 28 People applying for social work registration through this pathway usually have at least 10 to 15 years’ vocational experience and are more likely to be older and female. Over the last 13 years, 292 people gained social work registration through the experience pathway. Around a quarter of these people identified as Māori. However, the proportion of Māori section 13 applicants is increasing; for example, between the years of 2020 and 2022, 31 percent of social worker registrations under the experience pathway were people who identified as Māori<sup>1</sup>.
- 29 In 2020, SWRB reviewed and updated the standards it uses to assess the competence of people applying for registration through the experience pathway. This made the application process more holistic and culturally responsive, and increased its accessibility for Māori. Recent SWRB engagement with Māori social workers through Oranga Tamariki has highlighted that there is interest from tangata whenua practitioners, for a process under section 13 that uses a stronger kanohi ki te kanohi (person-to-person) approach. Communication with the sector about the changes to the experience pathway is ongoing. Increasing awareness of these changes and relationship-based work to reduce barriers may make it easier and more attractive for experienced people to apply for registration, particularly for Māori applicants.

*There has been a growing recognition of the need for an inclusive and culturally representative workforce and the value of indigenous practice in social work*

- 30 Over the last five years, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to increase the diversity of social and other sector workforces to better reflect the range of communities that they serve. The social sector has continued to work on improving the cultural responsiveness of social services, and SWRB has been focused on lifting the cultural competency and diversity of the social worker workforce, which the experience pathway supports. This has included a focus on creating more equitable pathways to social worker registration for Māori. SWRB has also started to work on more accessible ways for other groups underrepresented in the profession such as Pacific Peoples and disabled people.

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<sup>1</sup> In the same period, Māori made up 28% of all people applying for registration through the prescribed qualification pathway.

31 In 2020, Cabinet appointed SWRB as the lead agency for social work workforce planning [SWC-20-MIN-0111 refers], which has resulted in a more strategic, system-wide, and coordinated approach to addressing workforce challenges. SWRB is still developing and embedding this leadership role with its government agency partners. SWRB's approach also aligns with its shift towards a more equity-based approach to social worker registration. As a Crown Entity, SWRB has been working on better fulfilling its role as a Te Tiriti o Waitangi partner and has strengthened its relationships with Māori. <sup>s 9(2)(f)(iv)</sup>

32 There is also a growing awareness of the role of Māori-specific social work practice, and a need to recognise and value indigenous approaches to social work and broader indigenous expertise. Feedback from sector representatives such as the Tangata Whenua SWA has reinforced this view and emphasised that a qualification alone does not make someone a competent social worker. Rather, broader experience and practice is also essential in building competence.

### **The views of the social work sector have also been considered**

33 Officials have consulted with the sector, including with the Tangata Whenua SWA and the SSPA. They are strongly supportive of a time-limited extension of the experience pathway to enable the sector to implement the pay equity extension. They also see the value in providing more time for culturally responsive pathways to social work qualification and registration to be developed before the experience pathway is removed. These two peak bodies have recently written to me confirming their strong support of the proposal to delay the repeal of section 13. The Social Work Alliance made up of government and non-government social work sector representatives<sup>2</sup> also support a time limited extension of the experience pathway.

### **I propose delaying the repeal of the experience pathway until February 2028 as an interim measure**

34 I propose delaying the repeal of section 13 of the SWR Act, by amending section 2(2) of the SWRL Act, to keep the experience pathway open until 27 February 2028. This provides time for SWRB (alongside MSD and other agencies) to consider longer-term options for entry into social work, while capturing the benefits and opportunities presented by the pay equity extension. This proposal has support from representatives across the social work sector in light of implications of the pay equity extension and broader equity considerations.

35 A time-limited extension for the experience pathway is appropriate as it was never intended to be a permanent option for social worker registration. Over time, the pool of people eligible to register through the experience pathway is likely to gradually diminish and will become less relevant. SWRB and its partners are working on developing accessible pathways to social work qualifications for underserved groups

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<sup>2</sup> The Social Work Alliance is a cross-sector representative body convened by SWRB and includes: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa New Zealand, Health New Zealand Social Work Lead, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, Social Service Providers Aotearoa, SWRB, Tangata Whenua SWA, Te Toitū Waiora – Workforce Development Council, New Zealand Public Service Association, Department of Corrections, Oranga Tamariki, and Te Puni Kōkiri.

which, in time, can help to grow a diverse and representative social work workforce. These pathways are likely to supersede the experience pathway.

- 36 Delaying the repeal until 27 February 2028 is suggested on the basis that SWRB is due to submit its next five-yearly review of the SWR Act (the review) by 2025. The review will likely include long-term considerations for social worker registration. For example: the importance of workforce inclusivity; how to embed tikanga Māori and indigenous models of practice; supporting Māori and Pacific student retention and achievement; and further options to address workforce supply and demand issues. An additional three years is suggested to allow time for any legislative amendments resulting from the review's recommendations to be progressed through the House of Representatives (the House).
- 37 I also seek Cabinet's approval to include the *Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill* (to delay the repeal of the experience pathway) (the SWRL Amendment Bill) on the 2023 Legislative Programme with a category three priority (to be passed if possible before the 2023 general election).

### **I have considered risks to extending the experience pathway**

- 38 There may be a perception across some parts of the public and social work sector that academic qualifications directly correlate to professionalism. Engagement with the sector and agencies, highlighted concerns that section 13 creates a two-tier workforce between those who have qualifications and those who do not. There is a perception from some that people with a qualification are likely to maintain a higher level of public safety and professionalism. There is a similar risk that these views are held by the broader public, and a public perception that delaying the repeal removes a safeguard. This proposal is likely to be subject to scrutiny and discussion at Select Committee.
- 39 To address this risk, SWRB will engage with the sector to raise awareness of the safety mechanisms in place for all registered social workers (regardless of their qualification status) and provide assurance that its criteria uphold both public safety and professionalism of social workers.

### **Work is underway to consider entry pathways to social work over the longer term**

- 40 Further consideration is being given to the role of the experience and/or alternative entry pathways into social work over the long-term. There are several related pieces of work either underway or being scoped that explore long-term solutions to increase workforce supply and diversity that recognise experience and address education barriers.
- 41 As part of the pay equity extension, SWRB will undertake a one-off workforce mapping project from April 2023 to scope and identify public safety considerations for those undertaking work that is substantially similar to social work. This will give a clearer picture of this workforce and enable SWRB to strategically promote social worker registration, including to people who may be eligible for the experience

pathway. The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) will work alongside SWRB on this project.

- 42 As part of a review of education standards, SWRB are looking at reviewing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) requirements. This work has been delayed due to COVID-19 impacts. SWRB will be considering whether the current RPL requirements are fit for purpose. This could be an opportunity to widen the currently narrow scope of the RPL standards to consider whether experience could be credited towards a social work qualification as a long-term alternative to the experience pathway.
- 43 Staircasing education pathways and micro-credentials are also being considered by SWRB through its initiative with Oranga Tamariki establishing a training standards framework. These options are likely to be more accessible to people who face barriers to traditional qualifications and education. SWRB have begun initial exploratory work on alternative entry pathways to social work but would need to identify funding options to progress this work further. This could be considered as part of a future funding review of its strategic work programme in the 2023/24 financial year. SWRB will keep ministers informed of this and other work as it develops, including identifying ministerial decisions that would be required as appropriate.

**Tiriti o Waitangi Analysis**

- 44 The table below summarises how the proposal to delay the repeal of the experience pathway aligns with the Crown’s Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations:

Table 1: Alignment with the Crown’s Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations

<b>Te Tiriti O Waitangi Article</b>	<b>How does the proposal to extend the experience pathway support the Crown’s Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations?</b>
Article 1 Kāwangatanga	<p>Retaining the experience pathway for a further four years is an act of good faith. It that recognises that SWRB’s experience pathway processes have only recently become more accessible for Māori and that more time is needed for Māori to be able to use this pathway for registration before it is removed.</p> <p>Additional time will enable the growth of stronger relationships and greater trust between SWRB and Māori working in the social sector, making the experience pathway more attractive and accessible for these people.</p>
Article 2 Rangatiratanga	<p>Enabling Māori to enter and/or remain in the social work workforce can lift the accessibility of culturally responsive social work services for Māori people and whānau. Such services tend to be better equipped to support Māori people and whānau to exercise rangatiratanga.</p>



	<p>Increasing the representation of Māori in the social work workforce also supports rangatiratanga by enabling these kaimahi to have a stronger voice in decision making and service design in the sector.</p>
<p>Article 3 Ōritetanga</p>	<p>Delaying the repeal of the experience pathway will enable experienced Māori practitioners working in the social sector to have their skills recognised and be included in the social work workforce. Accessible pathways to social work also make workforce entry more equitable for Māori.</p> <p>Having more skilled Māori practitioners in the workforce will foster a more diverse profession which better reflects the communities it serves. This will enable social work service accessibility for Māori people and whānau which will enable equitable wellbeing outcomes.</p>

**Financial Implications**

- 45 The proposal in this paper has no financial implications. SWRB resourcing to process section 13 applications will continue to be funded by registration fees.

**Legislative Implications**

- 46 Cabinet agreement is sought to add the *Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill* to the 2023 legislative programme at category three priority (to be passed if possible before the 2023 general election). Due to the time sensitivity, this would be a standalone Bill updating the SWRL Act as recommended by the Parliamentary Counsel Office. <sup>s 9(2)(f)(iv)</sup>
- 47 Timing will need to be carefully managed to ensure the standalone Bill is passed before the repeal takes effect on 27 February 2024. Success depends on the process running smoothly, as well as minimal delays caused by the election year. If the Bill does not pass before 27 February 2024, there will be a legislative gap and people without a SWRB prescribed qualification will no longer be able to apply for registration. A new Bill would need to be drafted and passed through the House to reinstate the experience pathway (or an equivalent).
- 48 The proposed amendment to the SWRL Act will take effect through the SWR Act, which is binding on the Crown.

## Impact Analysis

### Regulatory Impact Statement

49 The Treasury’s Regulatory Impact Analysis team has determined that the extension of the experience pathway for social worker registration is exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement on the grounds that it has no or only minor impacts on businesses, individuals, and not-for profit entities.

### Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

50 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this proposal as the threshold for significance is not met.

### Population Implications

51 The table below outlines the implications of delaying the repeal of the experience pathway for key population groups.

Population group	How the proposal may affect this group
Children and Youth	The incentives from the pay equity extension for people with practical experience and core competencies to register as a social worker will benefit children and youth who interact with social services, especially those with additional needs. The accountability and oversight mechanisms under social worker registration ensures the quality and safety of services. Children and youth with intersecting identities are more likely to benefit from representative social workers that reflect their own identities and lived experience.
Disabled people	Disabled people are more likely to face barriers to education and training than non-disabled people. Disabled people with experience in social work and core competencies without an approved qualification will benefit from the continuation of a pathway to recognise their experience for registration, as well as longer term work to consider alternative entry pathways into the social work workforce.  Disabled people who use social worker services will also benefit from the accountability and oversight mechanisms under social worker registration.  In particular, Tāngata whaikaha Māori are overrepresented in the disabled population so it is especially important that they can access culturally competent social workers.
Older people	Indicative data from SWRB highlights that the social work workforce is ageing. Older people are more likely to have a broader range of life and practical experience that would be applicable to social work. Older people doing substantially

	<p>similar work to social work, with vast practical experience would benefit from the experience pathway remaining available. Part of the criteria for assessing applications through the experience pathway is ‘enough practical experience to compensate for lack of formal prescribed qualification’, which SWRB advise is generally around 10-15 years’ experience, meaning older practitioners are more likely to benefit from this proposal.</p> <p>New Zealand’s older population is growing and becoming increasingly diverse. Older people who have experienced disadvantage throughout their lifetime are more likely to experience poorer health and social outcomes in later life, meaning they are more likely to require social work support. In particular, it is becoming increasingly important that the social work workforce meets the needs of older Māori, Pacific and migrant New Zealanders, older disabled people and older people with diverse genders and sexual orientations.</p>
<p>Pacific Peoples</p>	<p>Pacific Peoples make up a comparatively small proportion of the registered social worker workforce. Pacific Peoples are more likely face education and training barriers and will benefit from recognition of practical experience as well as long term work to consider entry pathways into the social worker workforce.</p> <p>Pacific Peoples are also more likely to interact with social services and social workers and will benefit from a more culturally representative social worker workforce that understands their needs and experiences.</p>
<p>Ethnic communities</p>	<p>New Zealand’s population is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse requiring a social work workforce that can meet the needs of culturally diverse groups. The proposal supports the entry of people from ethnic communities into the workforce which helps to grow the diversity and the cultural competence of the social work profession in New Zealand.</p>
<p>Women</p>	<p>Indicative data from SWRB highlighted that the majority of the social worker workforce are women, with just under 85% of respondents to SWRB’s latest workforce survey identifying as female. This suggests that women are more likely to benefit from the pay equity extension, and those doing substantially similar work to social work who are eligible for social worker registration under section 13 will be incentivised to register and will benefit from the pathway continuing to be available to them, increasing their income further.</p>

## Human Rights

- 52 The proposals in this paper are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

## Consultation

- 53 MSD has consulted across government and with the social work sector to inform the proposed delay of the experience pathway repeal. MSD is working closely with SWRB on delaying section 13's repeal and SWRB strongly supports the approach proposed.
- 54 Oranga Tamariki and Manatū Hauora and Te Aka Whai Ora support the proposal as it provides a more accessible pathway for social work registration for Māori. It also supports Pacific People and others who are underrepresented in the social work workforce to become social workers. Oranga Tamariki supports keeping the experience pathway open for a fixed period in light of the recent decision to extend the social sector pay equity settlement to all government-funded providers but does not support its indefinite continuation.
- 55 Other government departments and agencies provided feedback on this proposal including Whaikaha, Te Puni Kōkiri, Te Whatu Ora, Te Arawhiti, Te Puna Aonui, Police, the Accident Compensation Corporation, Tertiary Education Commission, Te Kawa Mataaho, Ministry of Education, the Employment Education and Training Secretariat, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, the Child and Poverty Reduction Group, and the Office for Seniors. All departments were supportive of the proposal and acknowledged the importance of a diverse and representative social work workforce.
- 56 Officials have consulted with the sector, including with the Tangata Whenua SWA and the SSPA. They are supportive of a time-limited extension of the experience pathway to enable the sector to implement the pay equity extension. They also see the value in providing more time for culturally responsive pathways to social work qualification and registration to be developed before the experience pathway is removed. These two peak bodies have recently written to me confirming their support of the proposal to delay the repeal of section 13. The Social Work Alliance made up of government and non-government social work sector representatives<sup>3</sup> also supports a time-limited extension of the experience pathway. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers are supportive of the time-limited extension, however indicated that a three-year delay may be more appropriate.
- 57 I do not intend to make any public statement on these proposals before introduction to the House, but officials will ensure that the sector is kept informed of the progress of this work.

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<sup>3</sup> The Social Work Alliance is a cross-sector representative body convened by SWRB and includes: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa New Zealand, Health New Zealand Social Work Lead, New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, Social Service Providers Aotearoa, SWRB, Tangata Whenua SWA, Te Toitū Waiora – Workforce Development Council, New Zealand Public Service Association, Department of Corrections, Oranga Tamariki, and Te Puni Kōkiri.

## Proactive Release

58 If agreed, this proposal will continue to be under active consideration for more than 30 days after it is tabled at Cabinet. For this reason, I do not intend to proactively release and publish this paper until after the SWRL Amendment Bill has passed through the House.

## Recommendations

The Minister for Social Development and Employment recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that section 13 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (SWR Act) currently enables people without a prescribed qualification to apply to register as a social worker on the basis of demonstrating (significant) practical experience and meeting the professional competency standards set by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB);
- 2 **note** that section 13 of the SWR Act is due to be repealed on 27 February 2024;
- 3 **note** that in November 2022, Cabinet agreed to extend the benefits of the pay equity settlement for social work in the funded sector (the pay equity extension), including for employees doing substantially similar work to social work [CAB-22-MIN-0196];
- 4 **note** that the pay equity extension provides a significant financial incentive for those doing work substantially similar to social work to register as social workers through the experience pathway, and will likely increase demand for the pathway;
- 5 **note** that the experience pathway provides a key entry point to the social worker workforce for Māori particularly while longer-term work on entry pathways to social work are being considered;
- 6 **note** that the Ministry of Social Development has consulted the social work sector about delaying section 13's repeal and the Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association and Social Service Providers Aotearoa have written to me expressing their strong support for this proposal;
- 7 **note** that the Social Workers Registration Board will complete its next review of the SWR Act by 2025 and this will consider more accessible pathways for social worker registration
- 8 **agree** to amend section 2(2) of the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019 (SWRL Act), delaying the repeal of section 13 of the SWR Act to 27 February 2028, through a standalone Bill: the Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill;
- 9 **agree** to add the Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill to the 2023 Legislative Programme as a category three priority (to be passed if possible before the 2023 general election);
- 10 **invite** the Ministry of Social Development to issue drafting instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel Office to draft the Bill and any associated changes to the SWRL Act and/or SWR Act;

- 11 **authorise** the Minister for Social Development and Employment to make any necessary decisions on minor or technical matters that may arise during the drafting process that are consistent with policy decisions agreed by Cabinet.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

Minister for Social Development and Employment