

Public Comment:
August 12-27, 2024

Letter of Notification (LON) - Abbreviated

Master of Science in Social Work

College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences

Department of Behavioral Sciences



August 9, 2024

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Section I: Overview

Program Information

Institution:	University of Tennessee Martin
College/School/Division:	College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences
Department:	Department of Behavioral Sciences
Title of Degree Program:	Master of Science in Social Work
Degree Designation:	MSSW
Concentration(s):	Rural Social Work
CIP Code:	44.0701
CIP Code Title:	Social Work
CIP Code Definition:	A program that prepares individuals for the professional practice of social welfare administration and counseling and focuses on the study of organized means of providing basic support services for vulnerable individuals and groups. Includes instruction in social welfare policy, case work planning, social counseling and intervention strategies, administrative procedures and regulations, and specific applications in areas such as child welfare and family services, probation, employment services, and disability counseling.
SOC Code/Definition:	11-9151 Social and Community Service Managers 21-1013 Marriage and Family Therapists 21-1019 Counselors, All Other 21-1021 Child, Family, and School Social Workers 21-1022 Healthcare Social Workers 21-1023 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers 21-1029 Social Workers, All Other 21-1092 Probation Officers & Correctional Treatment Specialists 25-1113 Social Work Teachers, Postsecondary

Proposed UT BOT Approval: February 2025

Proposed THEC Approval: May 2025

Proposed Implementation Date: August 2026

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System Letter of Support



THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE SYSTEM

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, RESEARCH AND STUDENT SUCCESS

August 5, 2024

Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director
Tennessee Higher Education Commission
312 Rosa L Parks Ave., 9th Floor
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Dr. Gentile

On behalf of the University of Tennessee at Martin, please accept this Letter of Notification (LON) for a proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW). The proposed program will be 30 credit hours and delivered online. Specifically, the program will enable current students, alumni of the BSSW program, working professionals, and other adult learners to earn an advanced degree in their careers. Tennessee's Northwest and Southwest regions are characterized by their predominantly rural landscapes, which present distinct challenges requiring specialized knowledge and skills in social work practice. The proposed program will emphasize rural social work, addressing the specific needs of these communities, and will be designed with this emphasis, which is not offered by any other Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)-accredited institutions in Tennessee. We believe the proposed program will be a valuable addition to UT Martin and these rural regions of the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernie Savarese', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bernie Savarese, Ed.D.
Vice President of Academic Affairs, Research, and Student Success
University of Tennessee System

CC: Yancy Freeman
Phil Cavalier
Cindy West
Stephanie Kolitsch
Matt Matthews
Karen Galicia
Betty Dandridge Johnson

400 W. Summit Hill Drive (physical) • 505 Summer Place (postal) • UT Tower 1258 • Knoxville, TN 37902 • (865) 974-3843
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Campus Letter of Support



Office of the Chancellor
325 Administration Building
554 University Street
Martin, TN 38238
office: (731) 881-7500
fax: (731) 881-7019

July 8, 2024

President Randy Boyd
University of Tennessee
505 Summer Place / UT Tower
Knoxville, TN 37902

Dear President Boyd:

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to request your support for the establishment of a new Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) Program within the College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Enclosed with this correspondence is the Letter of Notification detailing our proposal for the MSSW Program. We believe this initiative will have a transformative impact on our students, our university, and the broader community, state, and region.

The MSSW Program we envision at UT Martin seeks to address critical gaps in rural social work education. The addition of the proposed UT Martin MSSW Program focused on Rural Communities would provide knowledge of assessment of the needs of those rural communities and the families, groups and individuals living within those rural communities that would be essential to assist in the sustainability of the positive direction those grants are sure to offer.

As you are aware, rural areas face unique challenges in mental health care, health care, and social services, including disparities in access and quality of care. Master level Social Workers are uniquely positioned to be of pivotal importance to the ongoing work of the UT Grand Challenges of Strengthening Rural Communities; Advancing K-12 Education; and Overcoming Addiction. With nearly one-fifth of the U.S. population residing in rural areas, there is a pressing need for specialized training and services tailored to these communities.

One distinguishing feature of our program will be its rural emphasis, integrated throughout the curriculum. This emphasis aims to equip our graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively address the specific needs and challenges of rural populations, including issues related to mental health, social services, and community development.

Moreover, UT Martin, located in rural West Tennessee, is uniquely positioned to offer this program with our main campus, six Regional Center locations and robust online learning infrastructure. This accessibility will allow us to reach and serve students across Tennessee and beyond, fostering a wider impact on rural communities.

Once approved by the UT Board of Trustees (UTBOT), Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), our next step will be to pursue accreditation from the Council on Social

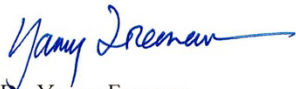
President Randy Boyd
July 8, 2024
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Work Education (CSWE). We are confident in the resources available within University, the College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences and UT Martin's Meek Library to support the program with the possibility of minimal additional expenses.

We seek your endorsement and support as we move forward with this initiative. Your leadership and advocacy will be instrumental in securing the necessary approvals to launch and sustain the MSSW Program, ultimately benefiting the UT System, our university and the communities we serve. We look forward to working with the existing accredited UT programs across Tennessee in the spirit of One UT.

Thank you for considering this request. I am available at your convenience to further discuss the program and answer any questions you may have regarding this request.

Sincerely,



Dr. Yancy Freeman
Chancellor

c: Philip Acree Cavalier
Bernie Savarese
Karen Galicia
Betty Dandridge Johnson
Cindy H. West
Justin Martin
Lisa Clifton
Alicia Maya Donaldson
Stephanie Kolitsch

Section II: Background

Purpose and Nature of Academic Program

Background and Context of the Proposed Program

The UT Martin undergraduate Social Work Program, a Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW), has a rich history of success since its inception in 1974. It was first identified as 'Social Welfare' within the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice and is now located within the Department of Behavioral Sciences. The UT Martin BSSW has been continuously accredited since it received initial discipline-specific accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The last several accreditation cycles have shown no negative findings nor required additional reports. The BSSW emphasizes a 'generalist' approach at the bachelor level of practice, which will be mirrored during the first year of the Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program.

The BSSW program is currently offered on UT Martin's main campus and through five Regional Center locations in a face-to-face and distance learning cohort model. All program policies and requirements throughout coursework, field experience, and evaluation are the same regardless of location. These five regional centers serve BSSW students in rural areas, providing additional context for developing an MSSW program with a rural focus. UT Martin is the only public institution offering an undergraduate social work program that does not currently have a master's-level program. The demand for MSSW graduates in West Tennessee is significant, and UT Martin's students, alumni, and other individuals across the region remain eager to have the opportunity to further their social work education at UT Martin. Specifically, these stakeholders have encouraged faculty to complete several needs assessments (approximately every five years) to allow these students the opportunity. However, until now, a UT Martin MSSW Program has not advanced due to other competing priorities.

Other MSSW programs across the state have contributed to preparing master-level social workers for practice. However, we believe there are facets of the discipline that need to be highlighted in social work education, including rural health and mental health, substance abuse issues, accessibility to care, and rural administrative practice. Rural social work will be the specialization for the proposed UT Martin MSSW Program. This underserved area is home to many Tennesseans and Americans who deserve access to specialized professionals who can elevate the quality of care being offered in many areas where social workers regularly practice, such as:

- Health Care (e.g., hospitals, hospice, home health, dialysis clinic, oncology units, etc.)
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment (e.g., community mental health centers, private practice - Licensed Clinical Social Workers - LCSW, detox and inpatient substance abuse centers, outpatient A&D treatment, drug courts, etc.)
- Schools (K-12 public and private schools)
- Senior/Disabled Adult Agencies (e.g., senior/disabled adult community/daycare centers, residential care facilities, adult protective services, etc.)
- Children, Adolescent, and Family Services (Department of Human Services, Department of Child and Family Services, Youth Villages, child and adolescent inpatient and outpatient services, YM/WCA, summer camps, childcare services, etc.)

- Prisons and Juvenile Justice (West State Corrections, West Tennessee State Penitentiary, West Tennessee State Corrections, Probation, and Parole)
- Military (Veterans Affairs is the country's largest employer of social workers.)
- Public and Private Agencies (Carey Counseling Center, Pathways, Tennessee Department of Children's Services, Second Harvest Foodbank, and Carl Perkins Exchange Center)
- Other Areas (i.e., there are additional areas in which MSSWs serve in elected offices and corporate leadership).

Most of these social workers and the services they provide touch individuals who struggle with poverty, unemployment, abuse, and addiction. In rural areas, these issues are significantly more prevalent and exacerbated by limited or no public transportation, isolation, and inadequate health and mental health services, among others. Rural social workers become magicians by creating much with little. UT Martin seeks to contribute to its region of Tennessee and other rural areas across the state by addressing these underserved, although no less critical, individuals.

Rural Specialization Proposed in the UTM MSSW Program

Northwest and Southwest Tennessee regions are characterized by their predominantly rural landscapes, which present distinct challenges requiring specialized knowledge and skills in social work practice. The proposed MSSW Program at the University of Tennessee at Martin will emphasize rural social work, addressing the specific needs of these communities.

1. Unique Challenges in Rural Areas:

- Healthcare Access: "Health disparities between rural and urban areas tripled between 1999 and 2019."¹ Rural residents often face barriers to healthcare access, including fewer healthcare providers, longer travel distances, and limited public transportation.
- Rural areas, often referred to as rural America, comprise approximately 97% of the United States' land area. An estimated 60 million people, or one in five residents (17.9% of the total U.S. population), live in rural areas, and 40 % of Tennessee's adults 65 and older live in rural areas.²
- Individuals living in rural areas are chronically underserved. A new report³ from Tennessee's Rural Health Care Task Force indicates that "Nearly 97% of Tennessee counties are designated as a primary care professional shortage area, 98% of counties include a dental care professional shortage area, and 100% of counties include a mental health care professional shortage area, which restricts access to care."⁴
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services: There is a significant shortage of mental health professionals in rural areas, leading to unmet needs in mental health and substance abuse services. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States. Suicide was responsible for over 48,000 deaths in 2021, which is approximately one suicide every 11 minutes.

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrist/2024/03/12/the-rural-health-conundrum/#:~:text=Data%20show%20those%20in%20rural,tripled%20between%201999%20and%202019.>

² https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/rural_senior/TN

³ <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/program-areas/rural-health/Final-TN-Rural-Health-Care-Task-Force-Report-6-27-23.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrist/2024/03/12/the-rural-health-conundrum/?sh=1ac1adca1d81>

- In the past two decades, suicide rates have been consistently higher in rural America than in urban America. Between 2000-2020, suicide rates increased 46% in non-metro areas compared to 27.3% in metro areas.”⁵ When compared to rates of substance abuse in cities, rural communities have higher rates of alcohol and methamphetamine use, and rates of abuse of other substances are on the rise.⁶
- “A new poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation found that rural residents were disproportionately likely (42%) to report that they or someone in their family have been addicted to opioids, including prescription painkillers or illegal opioids such as heroin or fentanyl, compared to smaller shares reported by those living in suburban (30%) or urban (23%) areas.”⁷
- Economic Disparities: Rural communities frequently experience higher poverty rates, lower educational attainment, and fewer employment opportunities, contributing to a greater need for comprehensive social services. Tennessee had the country’s 12th-highest poverty rate in 2020. Counties with more children living in poverty tend to be more rural and have lower population growth, poorer health, less education, worse economic conditions, and fewer 2-parent households.⁸

2. Tailored Curriculum

The MSSW Program will include coursework and field placements focused on rural social work, ensuring graduates can effectively serve rural populations, including community organization, advocacy, and integrating services across healthcare, mental health, education, and social services. Advanced skills in social work allow the specializations social workers need to address the unique issues facing rural Tennessee and beyond.

3. Community Partnerships

The program will establish partnerships with local agencies, healthcare providers, community mental health centers, social and public service agencies, and schools in rural areas to provide students with hands-on experience and to foster collaboration in addressing the social service needs of those communities. As students gain experience in rural settings via social agency partnerships and their internship requirements, they begin to understand the challenges faced in rural communities and how to serve rural clients better, all while applying knowledge learned in the classroom to rural practice settings.

4. Supporting Data and Statistics

- *Local Healthcare Providers:* Interviews with local healthcare providers and social service agencies revealed a critical shortage of qualified social workers. Baptist Memorial Hospital-Union City, Pathways Behavioral Health Services, Carey Counseling Center, Wayne County

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/rural-health/php/public-health-strategy/suicide-in-rural-america-prevention-strategies.html#:~:text=Suicide%20was%20responsible%20for%20over,one%20suicide%20every%2011%20minutes.&text=In%20the%20past%20two%20decades,to%2027.3%25%20in%20metro%20areas>

⁶ Rural Health Information Hub. (2020, December 9). [Substance use and misuse in rural areas](#)

⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrist/2024/03/12/the-rural-health-conundrum/#:~:text=Data%20show%20those%20in%20rural,tripled%20between%201999%20and%202019.>

⁸ <https://www.sycamoreinstitute.org/child-and-family-poverty-in-tennessee/>

Halfway House, substance abuse providers, etc., reported difficulty filling open social work positions and anticipated a growing need as they expanded services⁹.

- *Educational Institutions:* Regional educational institutions, including K-12 schools, have indicated a need for more school social workers to address student needs, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The Tennessee General Assembly passed a bill in 2020-21 that requires one social worker for every 250 students. This called for a substantial increase from 1 per every 2000 students.
- *Community Needs Assessments:* Recent community needs assessments highlight significant gaps in mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and child welfare support in Northwest and Southwest Tennessee and throughout most areas of the state, underscoring the necessity for advanced training programs to supply qualified professionals. (See above.)

Program Purpose

UT Martin's proposed MSSW will enable current students, alumni of the BSSW program, working professionals, and other adult learners to earn an advanced degree in their careers. The program will be designed with a unique emphasis not offered by any other CSWE-accredited higher education institutions in Tennessee: a rural social work focus. The rural emphasis would be embedded in each track, clinical or administrative, in addition to each course of each track. There are currently only five CSWE-accredited social work programs in the United States with a rural emphasis.

For more than ten years, the University of Tennessee at Martin has diligently assessed the need for a Master of Science in Social Work Program. Multiple needs assessments have been crucial in determining the viability and demand for such a program. The fact that these assessments consistently point to unserved and underfunded human service needs in the region underscores the potential impact and relevance of establishing this program, as well as consistent student demand.

The findings from these needs assessments have provided a strong foundation for advocating for the creation of the MSSW Program. The LON will demonstrate the finding of the need for trained social work professionals in this community, as well as throughout this state and this region. Addressing unserved and underfunded human service needs is a valuable societal contribution and a strategic move in aligning educational offerings with the region's demands. Leveraging the data and insights from these assessments has been vital in planning, seeking support, and launching the Master of Science in Social Work Program. It is encouraging to see UT Martin's commitment to addressing critical community needs through higher education initiatives.

⁹ See more information under the employer survey in the feasibility study

Program Design and Delivery

Students may matriculate and complete the proposed MSSW degree via four pathways:

Pathway 1: Accelerated BSSW to MSSW Pathway/Advanced Standing (Full-Time)

Any student who has earned a bachelor's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited institution and meets the UT Martin graduate entrance requirements may complete the Advanced Standing Program in one calendar year while earning 30 additional hours at the graduate level as a full-time student. Because the first year of graduate study is equivalent to the BSW or BSSW, they are not required to complete the first year if they have mastered the material previously. Therefore, advanced-standing students may begin the second traditional year of an MSSW degree, completing the program in one year.

Advanced Standing Program (Full-Time)

- *Eligibility:* Students with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW or BSSW) degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited institution
- *Duration:* 1 calendar year
- *Credit Hours:* 30 graduate-level credit hours
- *Rationale:* The first year of graduate study overlaps with the undergraduate curriculum, allowing these students to bypass it per CSWE standards.

Pathway 2: Accelerated BSSW to MSSW Pathway/Advanced Standing (Part-Time)

The second option is a part-time Advanced Standing track, which allows a student to complete the program in 18 months instead of the full-time option of 12 months.

Advanced Standing Program (Part-Time)

- *Eligibility:* Same as the full-time Advanced Standing Program
- *Duration:* 18 months
- *Credit Hours:* 30 graduate-level credit hours
- *Rationale:* Provides flexibility for students who may be working or have other commitments

Pathway 3: Traditional Program (Full-Time)

Students entering graduate study from a major/discipline other than social work are eligible for a traditional 60-hour MSSW track, which may be completed in two years of full-time study).

Traditional Program (Full-Time)

- *Eligibility:* Students with an undergraduate degree in a field other than social work
- *Duration:* 2 years
- *Credit Hours:* 60 credit hours
- *Rationale:* Comprehensive program covering all foundational and advanced social work competencies

Pathway 4: Traditional Program (Part-Time)

Students entering graduate study from a major/discipline other than social work are eligible for a traditional 60-hour MSSW track, which may be completed in three years of part-time study.

Traditional Program (Part-Time)

- *Eligibility:* Same as the full-time Traditional Program
- *Duration:* 3 years
- *Credit Hours:* 60 credit hours
- *Rationale:* Provides a more flexible schedule for students balancing work, family, or other commitments

Program Delivery Methods

To accommodate the diverse needs of students, including working professionals and recent graduates, the Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) Program would begin by offering it online, utilizing synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods. However, through continuous assessment, additional delivery methods would be added as needed.

Program Goals and Benefits

The MSSW Program is designed to meet the increasing demand for advanced social work education among working professionals, those currently employed in the field seeking to enhance their qualifications and career prospects; recent graduates, students who recently completed their baccalaureate education and want to advance their knowledge and skills; and current students, undergraduates in their senior year who plan to continue their education seamlessly into graduate studies. Transfer students are also welcome. UT Martin's transfer policy states the following:

- Applicants must meet UT Martin's graduate admission requirements as well as those of the UT Martin MSSW Program.
- Transfer coursework equivalent to the first year of the M.S.S.W. program, completed in another accredited graduate social work program, can be accepted toward degree requirements.
- Transfer courses must be approved as equivalent to required and elective courses taken for graduate credit and passed with a grade of B or better.
- Decisions regarding credit transfer are made independently of admissions decisions. The MSSW Program Director must approve transfer courses.
- Transfer courses must be listed on the Admission to Candidacy form and will be placed on the student's university transcript only after admission to candidacy.
- Students are not eligible to receive academic credit for life experiences or previous work experiences and should be aware that transfer credit is not guaranteed for all courses.

UT Martin's MSSW program has several goals within the context of rural social work, which are to prepare advanced practice professionals to:

- Recognize the importance of providing ethical and culturally sensitive services for all client systems, particularly marginalized and underserved populations, through the use of the values, principles, and ethics that guide the social work profession
- Display a commitment to service by engaging in advanced policy practice aimed at advancing human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice for all client systems
- Develop and use ethical research to advance and enhance social work practice with all client systems
- Engage in competent practice and display specialized skills to assess, intervene, and evaluate individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities through the advanced use of evidence-based practices
- Remain committed to continuous development of self-awareness, critical thinking, professional development, lifelong learning, leadership skills, and service to the profession

Impact and Reach

The program aims to benefit:

- Students—by providing various pathways and flexible learning options to achieve students' educational and career goals
- Professionals—by enhancing skills and qualifications for professional career advancement
- Agencies—by supplying well-trained social work professionals to meet service demands
- Residents of Tennessee and Beyond—by improving social services through the education of competent and highly skilled social workers

By offering a range of completion tracks, the MSSW Program will ensure accessibility and flexibility that caters to the unique needs of each student and addresses the broader needs of the community and workforce.

Target Audience

The proposed Master of Science in Social Work Program will meet the growing need for an advanced degree for working professionals and current/recent students wishing to further their education as they enter or continue in Social Work. The proposed MSSW will meet the needs of students, professionals, agencies, and residents of Tennessee and beyond.

The BSSW program has established relationships with many regional social service agencies/programs. Many rural agencies that provide social services do not employ practitioners with bachelor's and master's degrees due to the need for more social work-educated professionals in rural areas. The sites offer needed services and good opportunities for practicum learning for students but lack the educated professionals required for practicum supervision. Therefore, professionals working in those agencies who are not currently master's level educated serve as an additional target audience for the MSSW program.

Alignment with State Master Plan and Institutional Mission

State Master Plan

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission's (THEC) prior State Master Plan and the Complete College Tennessee Act 2010 mandated universities focus on “educational attainment and increased degree production, taking into consideration Tennessee’s economic development, workforce development, and research needs.”¹⁰ The most recent THEC master plan for the years 2015-2025¹¹ adopts a longer view of educational opportunities in Tennessee by identifying this plan as the “Decade of Decision,” thereby continuing the Drive to 55 program goals of increasing the number of citizens who have obtained college degrees. Four underserved groups (low-income, adult, academically underprepared, and non-White) were also identified as needing attention to assist in these goals. While this plan primarily focuses on undergraduate students, “the state continues to acknowledge the critical need for academic programs of distinction at the graduate and professional level to fully address Tennessee’s economic development, workforce, and research needs.”¹²

UT Martin's MSSW Social Work Program supports these efforts as we continue the Drive to 55. Social Work's curriculum traditionally attracts many of the four underserved groups mentioned needed to assist with these goals. For example, in 2023, the nonwhite percentage of students at UT Martin was 22.45%, and the percentage of nonwhite students in the BSSW program was approximately 31%; 23% of social work students were adult learners compared to 12% of all degree-seeking undergrads; and 76% of social work students were Pell-eligible, compared to 48% of all degree-seeking undergrads. The data related to BSSW students is relevant as most of our graduates seek to attend an MSSW Program, particularly staying at UT Martin, to access the availability of “distinction at the graduate and professional level to fully address Tennessee’s economic development, workforce, and research needs.”

Institutional Mission

The University of Tennessee System's Mission and Visions

The University of Tennessee System's mission statement reads, serving all Tennesseans and beyond through education, discovery, and outreach that enables vital economic, social, and environmental well-being.¹³

The UT System currently has its Strategic Plan for 2021-2025¹⁴ conceptualized as Strategic Pillars illustrated by five distinct missions of the System, including (1) Enhancing Educational Excellence – Reimagining Admissions & Recruitment; (2) Expanding Research Capabilities – Leveraging Diversity & Inclusion to Expand Research; (3) Fostering Outreach & Engagement – Intentional Outreach to Underrepresented Communities; (4) Ensuring Workforce & Administrative Excellence – Ensuring an Inclusive Environment; and (5) Advocating for UT – Building Trust Through Transparent Communication. All five pillars are built on a foundation of Championing Inclusion, Diversity, and Engagement. Additionally, UT System President

¹⁰ <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/master-plan/finalmp.pdf>

¹¹ https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/master-plan/MasterPlan2025_0418.pdf

¹² https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/master-plan/MasterPlan2025_0418.pdf

¹³ <https://tennessee.edu/mission-statements/#:~:text=UT%20System%20Mission%20Statement.social%20and%20environmental%20well%2Dbeing.>

¹⁴ https://plan.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2022/05/Strategic-Plan-Update-Final_5_19_22.pdf

Randy Boyd has actualized these opportunities for growth by challenging faculty and staff to work toward solutions in the three UT System Grand Challenges¹⁵ of Strengthening Rural Communities, Advancing K-12 Education, and Overcoming Addictions.

The proposed MSSW Program at UT Martin would strategically place professional social workers in a rural workforce often underserved by these challenges. Master-level Social Workers are uniquely positioned to be pivotal to the ongoing work of President Boyd's Grand Challenges of Strengthening Rural Communities, Advancing K-12 Education, and Overcoming Addiction. The addition of the proposed UT Martin MSSW Program focused on rural communities would provide knowledge of assessment of the needs of the families, groups, and individuals living within those rural communities that would be essential to assist in sustaining the positive direction those grants are sure to offer. Additionally, school social worker roles have a more significant impact than ever. School social workers are in greater demand now in Tennessee schools than ever before, and the legislature revised the ratio of school social workers to students from 1:2,000 to 1:250.¹⁶ Detecting obstacles from homes and communities that are barriers to learning will allow social workers to identify the resources and assistance needed to remove those barriers. Again, this change places them in a position to sustain gains made by the Grand Challenge of Advancing K-12 Education.

Overcoming addiction is a challenge that social workers, as well as other health care and mental health providers, have battled for years. However, clinical social workers, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA), are the largest group of providers of mental health and substance abuse services in the country: "Clinically trained social workers make up a larger group than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses – combined. Given that social workers play such a key role in mental health services, the opportunities are only growing."¹⁷

The University of Tennessee at Martin Mission Statement¹⁸

UT Martin educates and engages responsible citizens to lead and serve in a diverse world,¹⁹ providing a high-quality undergraduate education in a traditional collegiate atmosphere characterized at all levels by close collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. Located in Northwest Tennessee, the university is committed to advancing the regional and global community through teaching, scholarly activities, research, and public service. The university serves over 6,000 undergraduate and 700 graduate students, offering programs on the main campus, at its regional centers in Ripley, Selmer, Somerville, Parsons, and Jackson, and online. UT Martin is a selective institution that provides outreach programs for sub-populations, including first-generation, adult, military, and transfer students. The most recent six-year graduation rate was 52 percent. UT Martin's Carnegie Classification is Master's Small, with select graduate offerings in Agriculture and Natural Resources, Business, Criminal Justice, Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Strategic Communications. The university is committed to maintaining academic excellence, encouraging community engagement and leadership enhancement, and nurturing a learning community that is accessible and welcoming to all. (Approved by UT Board of Trustees, June 24, 2022.)

¹⁵ <https://grandchallenges.tennessee.edu/>

¹⁶ [https://hopefulfutures.us/action-tennessee/#~:text=School%20Mental%20Health%20Professionals,-Little%20or%20no&text=School%20social%20workers%3A%20Tennessee%20has,ratio%20is%201%3A250\).](https://hopefulfutures.us/action-tennessee/#~:text=School%20Mental%20Health%20Professionals,-Little%20or%20no&text=School%20social%20workers%3A%20Tennessee%20has,ratio%20is%201%3A250).)

¹⁷ National Association of Social Workers <https://www.socialworkers.org/News/Facts/Social-Workers>

¹⁸ See Appendix B

¹⁹ <https://www.utm.edu/about-ut-martin/>

UT Martin is committed to advancing the regional and global community through scholarly activities, public service, and research. The University strives to prepare students for careers and professions that will improve their lives and the lives of the members of their communities, Tennessee, the United States, and the world. In addition to increasing student accessibility and engagement by providing opportunities to learn, practice, and implement the knowledge and skills developed while a student at the University, UT Martin is dedicated to meeting lifelong education needs by providing graduate programs, distance learning opportunities, online course delivery, and other creative endeavors. UT Martin adopted five goals in their 2018-2023 Strategic Plan.^{20, 21}

Outlined below is how the proposed MSSW program would address the objectives of the existing UT Martin Strategic Plan:

- *Goal I: Prepare graduates to be responsible, informed, and engaged citizens within their workplaces and the larger community.*
- *Goal II: Recruit, retain, and graduate students who are prepared for careers, professions, and life.*
- *Goal III: Ensure a campus that is open, accessible, and welcoming to all.*
- *Goal IV: Promote strategic, sustainable, and responsible stewardship of human, financial, and capital resources in support of university goals and objectives.*
- *Goal V: Improve the vitality and prosperity of West Tennessee and beyond while increasing the visibility of UT Martin through service and advocacy.*

The MSSW program would continue to add to the number of citizens who earn educational degrees in an area that shows a critical need for increased resources and treatment within the community. Additionally, it would improve and increase employment opportunities for its graduates. UT Martin's local, regional, and statewide reputation as an academic leader is reflected in the many ways the university assists the residents of Tennessee and beyond. By creating a master's degree in social work, UT Martin would expand its influence and assistance across the state and beyond by assisting in developing rural-focused clinical and administrative social work professionals.

²⁰ https://www.utm.edu/about-ut-martin/strategic-plan/media/UR_StrategicPlan_Summary.pdf

²¹ At this writing, UT Martin is gearing up to create a new five-year plan for 2024-29. The proposed MSSW's mission and vision will be congruent with the new Strategic Plan.

Institutional Capacity to Deliver the Proposed Program

The University of Tennessee at Martin is exploring the collaborative opportunities introducing a Master of Science in Social Work Program would make available for the disciplines within the College. The MSSW Program would attract UT Martin's social work graduates and be a graduate education option for other majors throughout the University. Undergraduate work in social work would not be required for a candidate to be eligible for admission to the MSSW Program. Many graduates are attracted to an advanced social work degree because of the broad and diverse opportunities within the discipline. Therefore, other majors within the behavioral sciences, this College, and this University would all be potential candidates for the MSSW degree.

Majors that might benefit most include Criminal Justice, Psychology, and Sociology. Criminal Justice (CJ) has a new graduate program, a Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ), focusing on criminal justice administration that attracts professionals in Law Enforcement and Corrections returning for a master's degree to enhance their administrative and leadership expertise. However, some CJ graduates may prefer to focus on skills in practice fields such as child abuse, probation and parole, juvenile justice, corrections, etc. The Criminal Justice Program and the Department of Behavioral Sciences concluded that the MSSW degree would not significantly impact MSCJ enrollment but could also provide for a need within this practice area.

The UT Martin School Counseling Program was recently accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). When the social work faculty researched the Counseling Program's student enrollment over the last ten years, they discovered that less than five social work students attended the Counseling Program when seeking a master's degree. All agreed that the impact of adding an MSSW program on counseling program enrollment would be negligible. However, UTM's social work faculty identified possible joint efforts in credentialing students in trauma-informed principles and best practices in the school setting involving trauma-informed practices for the classroom as teachers develop a holistic approach to working with their students and behavior management.

Data from the Lightcast Program Development and Review showed that the number of distance-offered programs has increased by 1,236.4% in the last ten years nationwide.²² UT Martin was the first university in the System to develop online education, training on course construction, and continuing development in course delivery. Since then, most UTM graduate programs have been offered online. Since the pandemic, even more students have demanded online options. Not surprisingly, many students who responded to the last two needs assessments listed their preference for online courses. We are fortunate to have very competent administrators and staff who ensure social work faculty have what is needed to successfully support online as our primary delivery method.

²² Lightcast Q1 2024 Data Set | lightcast.io p.7

Existing Programs Offered at Public and Private Tennessee Institutions

Table 1 highlights the 10 MSSW programs offered in Tennessee by institution, program focus, and average number of degrees awarded. These program offerings reflect MSSW programs at seven public universities and three private universities in Tennessee.

For an additional evaluation of program duplication, the number of MSSW programs in contiguous states was compared with each state's population, the number of behavioral health professions, and their ratio to each state's population. The number of MSSW programs in the southeastern region ranges from three in Arkansas to thirteen in North Carolina. In reviewing the ratio of behavioral health professionals, Tennessee is in the middle in the relationship of MSSW Programs to their state's population; the ratio of behavioral health professionals to population demonstrates the continued need. Please refer to Appendix B (Supplemental Program Information) for additional information on MSSW program offerings.

Table 1: Overview of Existing Programs in the State

Institution Name	Program Title and Degree Designation(s)	CIP Code	Description Focus of Program*	Degrees Awarded for 3 Years (Avg.) MSW Only
Austin Peay State University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	25
East Tennessee State University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Clinical or Direct Practice Certification: Addictions	67
Middle Tennessee State University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	30
Tennessee State University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	18
University of Memphis	Social Work: BA, MSW and DSW	44.0701	Certification: Addictions, Gender Studies, Non-Profit Management, Public Administration, Public Health, Urban Planning	61
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist – Aging and Gerontological Practice	26
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	Social Work: BSSW, MSSW, DSW, PhD	44.0701	Clinical or Direct Practice, Certification: Gerontology, Trauma, Forensic Social Work	251
King University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	13
Southern Adventist University	Social Work: AS, BSW, and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	31
Union University	Social Work: BSW and MSW	44.0701	Advanced Generalist	71

* Area of specialized practice and certification identified by the Council of Social Work Education.

Program CIP Codes

All programs in Tennessee have the CIP Code 44.0701, CIP Code for Social Work. The Social Work, Other CIP Code of 44.0799 has been assigned to three graduate certificate programs at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) and the University of Memphis. The CIP Code 44.0799 represents less common areas of practice within social work, such as UTK's Veterinary Social Work graduate certificate program.

Table 1 shows all Tennessee schools included in CIP Code 44.0701 and highlights all public and private institutions in Tennessee that offer Social Work programs and are classified with the CIP Code 44.0701.

Distinctiveness of Proposed Program

A UT Martin MSSW Program would work to educate students and prepare them for clinical and administrative rural practice with individuals, families, groups, and the larger community in addition to advanced and/or specialized practice. Offering an MSSW Program would enable students at the undergraduate level to be better prepared to engage and serve others, including the opportunity to lead and assist BSSW social workers in providing service and aid within our diverse world. An MSSW degree would enhance professional opportunities for advancement at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

While emphasis would be placed on promoting social justice and service to all persons, specific attention would be given to the unique challenges faced in rural West Tennessee. Issues of historical racism and sexism, both socially and systematically, as well as geographical challenges of rural social work, would be addressed as well. This combination of emphases would be consistent with the value of the profession's commitment to respect all people and the quest for social and economic justice. Students who graduated from a CSWE-accredited baccalaureate program in social work would be considered for advanced standing and may receive credit for their foundation work toward a master's degree, thus reducing the time necessary for earning a Master of Science in Social Work.

Rationale for the MSSW

UTM is seeking approval to offer an MSSW program. Our vision for our MSSW is to focus on integrating research and evidence-based practice in clinical practice, mental health, and administrative roles in rural social work. The department has strong undergraduate faculty researchers, and those faculty complete research projects for the community social services agencies provider in the area, in addition to their own scholarship. All students are taught to apply research methods to their own practice and learn how to utilize data to adjust modes of treatment, policy revisions/creation, and administrative practice strategies when necessary. From its inception, UT Martin has offered a BSSW program rather than a BSW Program. In keeping with that trajectory, we seek to develop an MSSW degree.

Accreditation

The external accrediting body for social work education is The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), whose Board of Accreditation is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation. The CSWE will be notified that we are seeking approval from our state entities for the proposed MSSW Program. The CSWE will not become involved until the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission approve UT Martin's request to add the MSSW Program at UT Martin. At that time, the CSWE would begin the pre-candidacy process for the program. The CSWE policy indicates the CSWE prefers to have a six-month notice after state approval and before the program is to begin. Due to the tight timeline, we will attempt to complete all requirements to satisfy THEC and the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees (UTBOT). The goal is to be an exceptional MSSW Program that fits in with the existing MSSW programs throughout Tennessee; however, it includes the additional important perspective of rural education central to our curriculum.

CSWE standards require that all accredited MSSW programs maintain a 1:12 faculty-to-student ratio. They also require a minimum of four full-time faculty members holding MSW degrees from accredited programs, and more than 50% of faculty members in the program have doctorate degrees. UT Martin is familiar with the CSWE requirements and is set to meet standards through its hiring plans and anticipated enrollment. CSWE provides a detailed timeline that places programs on their agenda depending on the submission date. This also impacts retroactive accreditation status. The process is three years and includes a pre-candidacy process, wherein an initial eligibility application is submitted. A program must be approved by the state accrediting bodies, as well as regional accreditors, to submit the initial eligibility application. The timeline we are working on requires submitting the initial eligibility application by February 1, 2025. However, earlier submission is preferred because CSWE only accepts the first ten approved eligibility applications for each meeting agenda. This submission would place the MSSW program at UT Martin on the June 2026 Board of Accreditation agenda, with a retroactive accreditation date of Fall 2026. This is the very latest timeline that can be accomplished to have a Fall 2026 start for the program.

Following the approval of the initial candidacy application, CSWE has a three-year candidacy process with various reviews, the first of which would be submitting the candidacy visit I document by March 1, 2025, placing the program on the June 2026 June BOA agenda. The first candidacy site visit would occur between December 1, 2025 – February 28, 2026. Each year following would include additional document submissions addressing various standards, with two more site visits occurring over the following two years. The final approval of the review will occur at the June 2028 Board of Accreditation meeting.

Candidacy Fees include a Candidacy Eligibility Fee of \$12,500, which is submitted with the Initial Eligibility Application. Candidacy Visit 1 Fee is \$7,000; Candidacy Visit 2 Fee is \$7,000. The Initial Accreditation Fee (including the initial accreditation eligibility application fee) is \$7,000. Total Candidacy Fees are \$33,500. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. The addition of the MSSW at UT Martin requires submission and approval by SACSCOC of a substantive change report. For programs to be implemented between July 1 and December 31, 2025, the substantive change report will be submitted to SACSCOC by January 1, 2025, to be reviewed by the Executive Council of the Board that meets year-round.

Section III: Feasibility Study

Local and Regional Workforce Needs/Demand

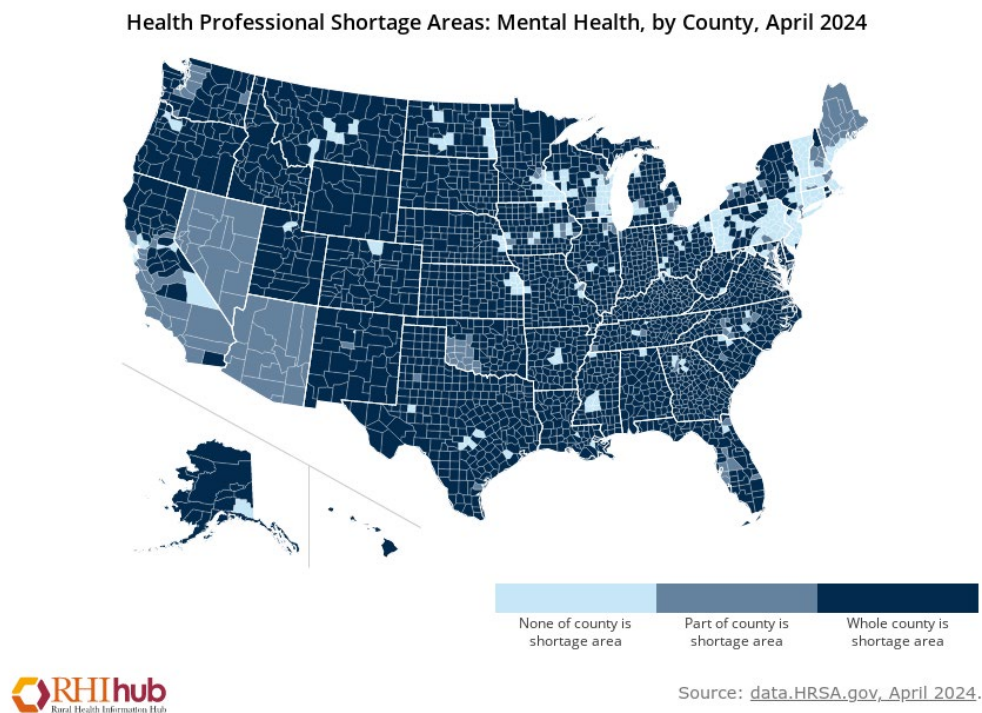
Workforce Projections: 2020 - 2030 and 2022 - 2032

Local and Regional Workforce Need:

What follows demonstrates the local and regional workforce need for highly qualified social workers in Northwest Tennessee and regionally, emphasizing addressing the unique challenges of rural communities. The following evidence supports this need and underscores the urgency and relevance of the proposed Program.

The Rural Health Information Hub provided the following map showing county-level data on Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), indicating counties entirely in an HPSA, partially in an HPSA, or not in an HPSA. Tennessee and all surrounding states (minus small areas in light blue where there is not an HPSA) demonstrate counties that are entirely in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).²³

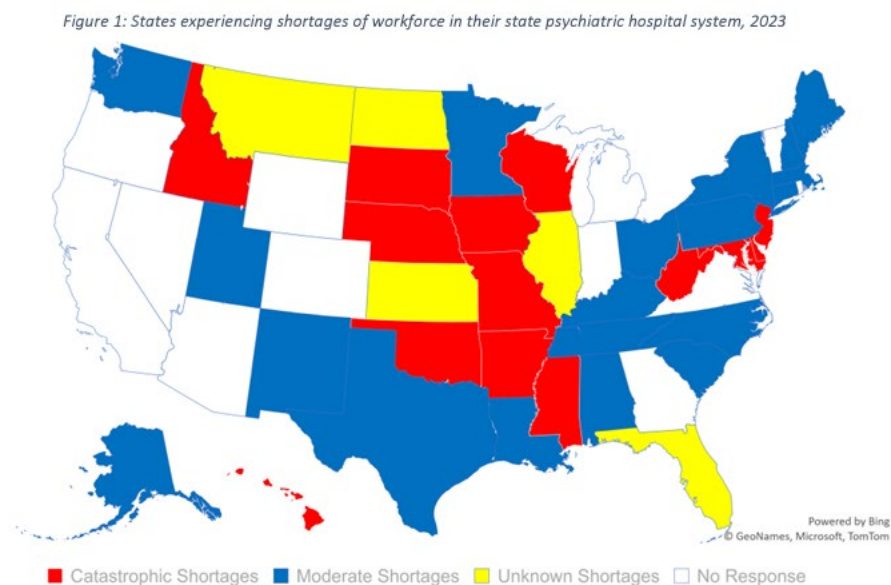
Figure 1: Mental Health Professional Shortages



²³ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7>

In 2023, NRI, Analytics Improving Behavioral Health, reported 38 states with workforce shortages impacting the operations of their state psychiatric hospitals. In 14 states, workforce shortages for at least some positions were described as “Catastrophic,” while 19 states reported experiencing “moderate” shortages, significantly impacting hospital operations. Five states reported shortages but could not characterize the level of shortages (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Psychiatric Hospital Workforce Shortages



Among Tennessee and its eight border states, all those responding to the survey reported a moderate or catastrophic workforce shortage in their psychiatric hospital system. Regarding social workers, six states reported a catastrophic shortage, 17 reported a moderate shortage, and 10 reported a minor shortage (three states with catastrophic shortages border TN, and four states with moderate shortages border TN).²⁴

According to the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, there is a substantial and growing demand for social workers in Northwest Tennessee and throughout the state. Specifically, job openings for social workers in various specialties are projected to increase significantly. The data show an annual increase in job openings for healthcare social workers (SOC 21-1022) in six regions; child, family, and school social workers (SOC 21-1021) in three regions; and mental health and substance abuse social workers (SOC 21-1023) in three regions. Social workers certified as Marriage and Family Therapists (SOC 21-1013) are needed in three regions, and those serving as school social workers/career counselors (SOC 21-1029) are needed in six regions.²⁵

In the *Martin Post* recently, the editor reported that Rehab.com’s latest report in May 2024 ranked Tennessee worst nationwide in drug abuse and addiction: “According to the report, Southern states,

²⁴ <https://www.nri-inc.org/media/kj0lsgpb/state-hospital-workforce-shortages-and-salaries-2023-may-2024.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/supply-demand/2024/2024%20Supply%20and%20Demand%20Report.pdf>

however, have the highest aggregate scores and appear to be most detrimentally affected by addiction, particularly relating to the opioid epidemic. According to these statistics, Tennessee, South Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina continue to bear the brunt of the drug crisis in the United States.”²⁶ Further in this paper, data is included that explains how often rural regions lead Tennessee and other states in substance abuse and addiction.

A recent article discussed Tennessee House Bill 2104, proposed legislation requiring “health insurance companies in the state to include an annual mental health check-up.” The article explains that the bill would allow patients to receive an annual mental health checkup with a licensed mental health professional without having to obtain a referral from a primary care physician. State Representative Bo Mitchell concludes, “This is an opportunity to drive mental health professionals to Tennessee and let the people know we’re going to take it seriously. This gets people help as needed.”²⁶ Since social workers are the largest group of mental health providers in this country, whether this bill passes or is dead in a committee, this is evidence that lawmakers and others recognize the need for mental health and substance abuse treatment is on the rise.

Employer Surveys for 2020 and 2024: In 2020 and 2024, an employer survey was administered to all field agencies. These agencies are affiliated with UT Martin’s social work program and have hosted practicum students at their sites. The response rate to the survey was 50% for 2024 and 57% in 2020. Both surveys were open for one week to allow for responses.

Key findings include:

- 83% (2020) and 71% (2024) of respondents indicated that their organization experienced difficulty finding master’s level social workers to hire.
- 47.67% (2020) and 11% (2024) of respondents reported a *substantial increase* in their organizational need for master-level social workers over the next five years.
- 46.67% (2020) and 54% (2024) of respondents reported an *increase* in their organizational need for master-level social workers over the next five years.
- 6.67% (2020) and 20% (2024) of respondents reported their organizational need for master-level social workers *to stay the same* over the next five years.
- In the 2024 survey, 83% of respondents cited an “insufficient number of master’s level applicants” when asked to identify common organizational hiring challenges.

Statewide and National Employment Opportunities for Graduates

The 2024 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Outlook Handbook²⁷ reveals “Overall, employment in community and social occupations is projected to grow faster than the national average and experience 281,600 annual openings from 2022 to 2032. Community and social occupations promote wellness to help people cope with or overcome challenges. As listed on the website, examples of occupations within this category include community health workers, marriage and family counselors, social workers, substance abuse, behavioral disorders, and mental health counselors. On average, about 281,600 openings

²⁶ Taylor, S. (2024, May 30). Tennessee Ranks Worst Nationwide in Drug Abuse, Addiction. The Martin Post, V-2, I-22.

²⁶ Bates, S. (2024, May 30). Mental Health Bill Proposal Pushed to Summer Study. The Martin Post, V-2, I-22.

²⁷ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/>

are projected each year in these occupations due to employment growth and the need to replace workers who leave the occupations permanently.” Also, social worker employment is expected to grow by 13% from 2022 to 2032, much faster than the average for all occupations of 3%. Job growth will be particularly strong for clinical social workers, which will be the primary concentration the UT Martin MSSW Program would like to offer in the context of rural needs. Clinical Social Work was identified as having the highest interest to our prospective candidates.

Social Work is a diverse field of specializations at the master’s level, making it difficult to project an exact national growth rate to be expected overall in the next 5 to 10 years. Therefore, three of the more common areas of specialization’s growth rates listed on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics were averaged to find an approximate rate. The areas included general social work (others) with a faster than average growth rate of 7%; healthcare social work at a much faster than average growth rate of 10%; and mental health, substance abuse, and behavioral disorders at a much faster than average growth rate of 18%; with a 11.67% combined mean for the three. In Tennessee, this trend is mirrored with social work positions in healthcare, mental health, and substance abuse services, which are particularly in demand. The economic and social challenges unique to rural Tennesseans, including higher-than-average poverty rates and a growing need for mental health services, amplify the demand for social work professionals.²⁸

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has identified healthcare and social assistance as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the region²⁹. Projections for the period from 2025 to 2030 indicate a continued upward trend in demand for social workers:

- **Healthcare Social Workers** (SOC 21-1022): The aging population and expanded access to healthcare services are expected to drive an 8.42% increase in job openings.
- **Child, Family, and School Social Workers** (SOC 21-1021): Projected to grow by 5.75%, reflecting increased recognition of the need for supportive services in educational settings and child welfare systems.
- **Mental Health, Behavioral Disorder, Substance Abuse Social Workers** (SOC 21-1023): Anticipated to grow by 14.39%, correlating with rising awareness and initiatives to address mental health and addiction issues.

²⁸ THEC <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/supplydemand/2024/2024%20Supply%20and%20Demand%20Report.pdf>

²⁹ According to the latest America’s Health Rankings® Annual Report, Tennessee is ranked 45th among the 50 states for access to mental health professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, counselors, marriage and family therapists, substance abuse treatment counselors, and advanced practice nurses and physician assistants specializing in mental health care), with a rate of 186.9 mental health providers per 100,000 residents of Tennessee, far less than the national rate of 305 mental health providers per 100,000 residents.”

Table 2: Labor Market Data: Alignment of SOC Codes with Social Work CIP Code

SOC Occupation Title	SOC Code	2023 Jobs	Annual Openings	Growth 2023-2028
Social and Community Service Managers	11-9151	20,614	2,067	9.51%
Marriage and Family Therapists	21-1013	6,282	646	16.81%
Counselors, All Other	21-1019	8,218	1,014	12.46%
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	21-1021	52,099	4,646	4.83%
Healthcare Social Workers	21-1022	24,825	2,608	8.42%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	21-1023	14,897	1,468	11.98%
Social Workers, All Other	21-1029	9,267	880	5.75%
Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	21-1092	14,589	1,249	1.20%
Social and Human Service Assistants	21-1093	48,206	6,064	9.68%

Source: Lightcast Q1 2024

The Tennessee Academic Supply for Occupational Demand Report maintains the Career Cluster structure, grouping occupations and aligned training programs in one place. Each cluster has the total number of in-demand occupations and aligned academic programs, including postsecondary programs at each degree level. The report includes 14 identified career clusters, with cluster eight encompassing human services occupations.³⁰

In the long-term growth predictions for occupations in Tennessee, social workers are represented in the category with healthcare and social assistance providers. *Jobs 4 Tennessee* reports long-term growth from 2020 to 2030, which is 19.70% or 80,000+ jobs in this category.³¹ The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Planning and Policy Council conducted a Needs Assessment Summary, which noted that in all regions across the state of Tennessee, there was a requested increase in the number of mental health and substance abuse professionals. Each region designated needs for workforce development and increase in services. Social workers have been identified as the top providers of mental health services in the nation and were specifically designated in the Needs Assessment Survey as the requested professionals for certain needs, such as suicide and substance abuse prevention and intervention. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), professional

³⁰ <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/other-research/supply-demand/2024/2024%20Supply%20and%20Demand%20Report.pdf>

³¹ <https://jobs4tnwfs.tn.gov/vosnet/analyzer/resultsNew.aspx?session=indproj&plang=E#>

social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health services providers. There are more clinically trained social workers—over 200,000—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined. In the Tennessee³²

³² <https://www.socialworkers.org/News/Facts/Social-Workers>)

Appendix A: Letters of Support

1. Carey Counseling Center, Inc., Brent Bullock, Chief Executive Officer
2. Pathways Behavioral Health, Ronica Smith, Licensed Clinical Social Worker
3. Student Health & Counseling Services- UT Martin, Jenifer Hart, Clinical Coordinator
4. Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, Dana Cobb, Regional Program Administrator/NW Regional Coordinator
5. Carey Counseling Center, Inc., Sean Jones, Clinical Operations Officer
6. Healthy Families Tennessee, Amanda Wilkin, Program Supervisor
7. Carl Perkins Center, Clay Jordan, County Director



Carey Counseling Center, Inc.
19410 West Main Street
Huntingdon, TN 38344
731-415-3346
sean.jones@careyinc.org
careycounselingcenter.org

April 19, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program at the University of Tennessee at Martin, with concentrations in both clinical and administrative social work.

Having had the pleasure of working with the existing Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) program at UT Martin, I can confidently say it is an exceptional program. Graduates consistently demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and ethical foundation necessary to thrive in the social work workforce and excel in further education.

The addition of an MSSW program with a rural emphasis is not only timely but essential. West Tennessee's rural communities face unique social challenges, and a graduate program specifically designed to address these issues will be invaluable. UT Martin's existing BSSW program has fostered a strong understanding of the importance of community engagement. This commitment, evident through internships and giving back to the community, positions the proposed MSSW program perfectly to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world practice in rural settings.

The enthusiasm surrounding this proposal amongst current BSSW students at UT Martin is a testament to the need for this program. Providing a seamless pathway for BSSW graduates to pursue their MSSW in a familiar environment with a focus on rural social work will empower them to become the next generation of leaders in this critical field.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of a Master of Science in Social Work program at UT Martin. With its outstanding BSW program as a foundation, a focus on rural social work, and a strong commitment to community engagement, this program has the potential to make a significant and lasting impact on West Tennessee and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brent Bullock".

Brent Bullock

Chief Executive Officer



July 17, 2024

Ronica Smith
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Pathways Behavioral Health
4039 Highland Ave
Milan, TN 38358

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the establishment of a new Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) degree program at the University of Tennessee at Martin. As someone who has had the privilege of working closely with the Social Work program in the past, I can attest to the excellence and dedication that the faculty and staff bring to their students' education and professional development.

The proposed degree program, with its clinical and administrative concentrations and rural emphasis, fills a crucial gap in higher education opportunities in West Tennessee. The University of Tennessee at Martin has a long-standing reputation for providing quality education, and the Bachelor of Science in Social Work program is a shining example of this commitment. Graduates of the undergraduate program are well-prepared for both the workforce and further graduate study, a testament to the program's effectiveness in equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills.

The introduction of a Master of Science in Social Work degree program will undoubtedly meet the growing demand for advanced education and training in this field within our region. As someone who has witnessed firsthand the enthusiasm and dedication of students towards their studies and future careers, I am confident that the prospect of pursuing a graduate degree in social work will be met with great excitement and anticipation. This program will not only enhance the educational landscape of West Tennessee but also contribute to the professional growth and success of individuals seeking to make a difference in the lives of others.

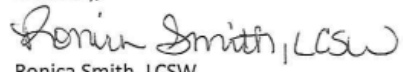
One of the strengths of the University of Tennessee at Martin's Social Work program is its strong community engagement through internships and volunteerism. This hands-on approach to learning not only enriches students' educational experiences but also fosters meaningful connections between academia and the wider community. I have seen how these partnerships benefit both students and the organizations they serve, and I have no doubt that they will continue to be a cornerstone of the new Master of Science in Social Work program.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the establishment of the Master of Science in Social Work degree program at the University of Tennessee at Martin. With its clinical and administrative concentrations, rural emphasis, and strong foundation built upon the success of the existing Bachelor of Science in Social Work

program, I am confident that this new endeavor will be a resounding success and will further elevate the University's reputation as a leader in social work education.

Thank you for considering my endorsement of this important initiative. I eagerly anticipate the positive impact that the Master of Science in Social Work program will have on our community and beyond.

Sincerely,


Ronica Smith, LCSW

MILAN OFFICE

4039 Highland Avenue • Milan, Tennessee 38358 • 731-723-1327 • FAX: 731-723-1339

July 17, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Having had the pleasure of working with the existing Bachelor of Social Work (BSSW) program, I am confident that UT Martin is well-positioned to offer a high-quality MSSW program with a unique rural focus.

The UT Martin BSSW program is renowned for its excellence. Graduates consistently demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the workforce or pursue graduate studies. Their success speaks volumes about the program's dedication to preparing competent and compassionate social workers.

The addition of an MSSW program with both clinical and administrative concentrations would be a tremendous asset to West Tennessee. The program's emphasis on rural social work is particularly exciting. Rural communities face distinct challenges regarding social services, and a specialized MSSW program would equip graduates with the expertise to address these needs effectively.

My experience collaborating with the UT Martin's BSSW program has consistently impressed me with their commitment to community engagement. The program fosters strong relationships through internships and volunteer service, ensuring that students gain practical experience while serving the local population. This dedication to community collaboration aligns perfectly with the core values of social work and positions the MSSW program to have a significant impact on West Tennessee.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly endorse the proposed MSSW program at UT Martin. The program's strong foundation in the existing BSSW program, its focus on rural social work, and its commitment to community engagement make it a compelling proposition. I am confident that the program will serve as a vital resource for West Tennessee, producing highly skilled social workers prepared to address the unique challenges and opportunities facing the region.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Hart, LMSW

Clinical Coordinator

Student Health and Counseling Services



Dana M. Cobb

Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth
NW Council on Children and Youth
470 Mustang Drive, Huntingdon, TN 37344
Cell; (731) 571-7271 – Email: Dana.Cobb@tn.gov

July 17, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

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The introduction of a Master of Science in Social Work degree program will undoubtedly meet the growing demand for advanced education and training in this field within our region. As someone who has witnessed firsthand the enthusiasm and dedication of students towards their studies and future careers, I am confident that the prospect of pursuing a graduate degree in social work will be met with great excitement and anticipation. This program will not only enhance the educational landscape of West Tennessee but also contribute to the professional growth and success of individuals seeking to make a difference in the lives of others.

One of the strengths of the University of Tennessee at Martin's Social Work program is its strong community engagement through internships and volunteerism. This hands-on approach to learning not only enriches students' educational experiences but also fosters meaningful connections between academia and the wider community. I have seen how these partnerships benefit both students and the organizations they serve, and I have no doubt that they will continue to be a cornerstone of the new Master of Science in Social Work program.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the establishment of the Master of Science in Social Work degree program at the University of Tennessee at Martin. With its clinical and administrative concentrations, rural emphasis, and strong foundation built upon the success of the existing Bachelor of Science in Social Work

program, I am confident that this new endeavor will be a resounding success and will further elevate the University's reputation as a leader in social work education.

Thank you for considering my endorsement of this important initiative. I eagerly anticipate the positive impact that the Master of Science in Social Work program will have on our community and beyond.

Sincerely,



Dana M. Cobb

Regional Program Administrator/NW Regional Coordinator
NW Council on Children and Youth
Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth



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April 19, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program at the University of Tennessee at Martin. I have had the pleasure of working with the existing Bachelor of Social Work (BSSW) program in several different capacities. I am currently an adjunct instructor in the BSSW program and have taught several courses over the course of 15 plus years. I am also the current internship coordinator at my agency. I am the Field Placement Supervisor for the BSSW program at my agency as well. We accept up to 4 interns from the BSSW Program every year. We also accept Volunteer placement students. Our agency has worked to develop and maintain a strong partnership with the UTM BSSW Program. The students that come from the UTM BSSW program are consistently well-prepared for the internship placement. The UT Martin BSSW program is well-known for its excellence. Graduates consistently demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the workforce or pursue graduate studies. Our agency has hired over 20 graduates from the BSSW program over the last several years. Their success speaks volumes about the program's dedication to preparing competent and compassionate social workers.

I am confident that UT Martin is well-positioned to offer a high-quality MSSW program with a unique rural focus. The addition of an MSSW program with both clinical and administrative concentrations would be a tremendous asset to West Tennessee. We have a shortage of competent Masters' prepared professionals in the West Tennessee area. We are constantly looking for Masters' prepared professionals for both outpatient therapist position and other positions. The program's emphasis on rural social work is particularly exciting. Rural communities face distinct challenges regarding social services, and a specialized MSSW program would equip graduates with the expertise to address these needs effectively. We would certainly serve as an internship placement for their MSW students. Having a local MSSW program to work with would be an asset to our community.

My experience collaborating with the UT Martin Social Work program has consistently impressed me with their commitment to community engagement. The program fosters strong relationships through internships and volunteer service, ensuring that students



gain practical experience while serving the local population. This dedication to community collaboration aligns perfectly with the core values of social work and positions the MSSW program to have a significant impact on West Tennessee. In conclusion, I wholeheartedly endorse the proposed MSW program at UT Martin. The program's strong foundation in the existing BSW program, its focus on rural social work, and its commitment to community engagement make it a compelling proposition. I am confident that the program will serve as a vital resource for West Tennessee, producing highly skilled social workers prepared to address the unique challenges and opportunities facing the region.

Sincerely,

Sean Jones, LCSW

Sean Jones, LCSW
Clinical Operations Officer
Carey Counseling Center



07/18/2024

Alicia Maya Donaldson
Program Director and Professor
UT Martin Social Work Program
205 Hurt Street
Martin, TN 38238

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program at the University of Tennessee at Martin, with concentrations in both clinical and administrative social work.

Having had the pleasure of working with the existing Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) program at UT Martin, I can confidently say it is an exceptional program. Graduates consistently demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and ethical foundation necessary to thrive in the social work workforce and excel in further education.

The addition of an MSSW program with a rural emphasis is not only timely but essential. West Tennessee's rural communities face unique social challenges, and a graduate program specifically designed to address these issues will be invaluable. UT Martin's existing BSSW program has fostered a strong understanding of the importance of community engagement. This commitment, evident through internships and giving back to the community, positions the proposed MSSW program perfectly to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world practice in rural settings.

The enthusiasm surrounding this proposal amongst current BSSW students at UT Martin is a testament to the need for this program. Providing a seamless pathway for BSSW graduates to pursue their MSSW in a familiar environment with a focus on rural social work will empower them to become the next generation of leaders in this critical field.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of a Master of Science in Social Work program at UT Martin. With its outstanding BSSW program as a foundation, a focus on rural social work, and a strong commitment to community engagement, this program has the potential to make a significant and lasting impact on West Tennessee and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amanda Wilkin".

Amanda Wilkin, MSW, IMHE
Program Supervisor, Healthy Families Tennessee



7/23/2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) program at the University of Tennessee at Martin, with concentrations in both clinical and administrative social work.

This program means a great deal to me on a number of different levels. I am a proud graduate of the UT Martin School of Social Work (BSW '99) and have been able to stay closely affiliated by supervising interns for a number of years. The level of students that complete their program are first rate and the knowledge and skills they possess are exemplary. I have also been able to take on a role as adjunct professor for the past two years and enjoy getting to work with the students and faculty of this great program.

The addition of an MSSW program is something that has garnered great interest in our little community and surrounding rural areas. The need for MSSW's is growing and will be essential for smaller communities, as they are already struggle to provide a wide array of quality services that are needed.

The BSSW program has been a huge asset to those of us in the field of Social Work, as it has provided a greater number of quality, prepared professionals that are in great demand. I have no doubt that a Master's Level program would be a tremendous asset and I wholeheartedly lend my endorsement of UT Martin establishing a Master of Science in Social Work program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Clay Jordan".

Clay Jordan, MS
Decatur County Director
Carl Perkins Center

125 Central Lane • Parsons, TN 38363 • ph 731.847.4020
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Appendix B: Supplemental Program Information

The table below provides a visual representation of how the MSSW Program Mission, UT Martin Mission, and UT Mission are connected and complementary, with language from each italicized for ease of understanding the connection to social work values.

MSSW Program Mission language	UT Mission Language	UT Martin Mission	Focus area & tie to social work values
It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to <i>prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice</i> to diverse populations across all social systems....	Serving all Tennesseans and beyond through <i>education</i> , discovery and outreach that enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being.	The University of Tennessee at Martin <i>educates</i> and engages responsible citizens to lead and serve in a diverse world.	Education & preparing students (value of competence)
....Emphasis is placed on promoting social justice and <i>service to all persons</i> , particularly underserved populations, including rural areas such as those found in Northwest Tennessee.	<i>Serving all Tennesseans and beyond</i> through education, discovery and outreach that enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being.	The University of Tennessee at Martin educates and engages responsible citizens to lead and <i>serve in a diverse world</i> .	Serving & outreach (value of service)
It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice <i>to diverse populations across all social systems</i> . Emphasis is placed on promoting social justice and service to <i>all persons, particularly underserved populations</i> , including	<i>Serving all Tennesseans</i> and beyond through education, discovery and <i>outreach</i> that enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being.	The University of Tennessee at Martin educates and <i>engages responsible citizens to lead and serve in a diverse world</i> .	Diversity & Service to all persons (Value of importance of human relationships)

rural areas such as those found in Northwest Tennessee.			
It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice to diverse populations across all social systems. <i>Emphasis is placed on promoting social justice</i> and service to all persons, <i>particularly underserved populations</i> , including rural areas such as those found in Northwest Tennessee.	Serving <i>all</i> Tennesseans and beyond through education, discovery and outreach that <i>enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being</i> .	The University of Tennessee at Martin educates and <i>engages responsible citizens to lead</i> and serve in a diverse world.	Social Justice/Leadership (Value of social justice)
It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice to <i>diverse populations across all social systems</i> . Emphasis is placed on promoting social justice and <i>service to all persons, particularly underserved populations</i> , including rural areas such as those found in Northwest Tennessee.	<i>Serving all Tennesseans</i> and beyond through education, discovery and outreach that enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being.	The University of Tennessee at Martin educates and <i>engages responsible citizens to lead and serve in a diverse world</i> .	Value of all persons (Value of dignity and worth of the person)

It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice...	Serving all Tennesseans and beyond <i>through education, discovery and outreach that enables strong economic, social, and environmental well-being.</i>	The University of Tennessee at Martin educates and engages <i>responsible citizens</i> to lead and serve in a diverse world.	Integrity, ethical practice, responsible citizenship (Value of integrity)
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University of Tennessee at Martin Social Work Program Mission and Vision

“It is the mission of the UT Martin Social Work Program to prepare students to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to demonstrate competent, ethical, evidence-based practice to diverse populations across all social systems. Emphasis is placed on promoting social justice and service to all persons, particularly underserved populations, including rural areas such as those found in Northwest Tennessee.”³³

The overall mission of the Social Work Program is congruent with the Tennessee Higher Education State Master Plan and the overall mission of the University of Tennessee system,³⁴ this university and the mission of the social work profession³⁵. The program’s primary purpose is preparing all social work students (main campus, online, and regional center) to become practitioners who promote human and community well-being. Student preparation is organized by competency around clinical and administrative rural practice knowledge, skills, and values along with their cognitive and affective processes to emphasize the multifaceted nature of the social work profession. The program’s graduates will demonstrate their competence in ethical, research-informed practice and practice-informed research with diverse client systems of all sizes. The profession’s values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, human rights, and scientific inquiry are woven in explicitly and implicitly throughout the curriculum. This grounds students’ education of knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes in the profession’s deeply held values in preparing students for practice. The mission is consistent with the purpose and values of the profession (and noted in the table below)³⁶ and all the UT System’s foundation of Championing Inclusion, Diversity and Engagement.³⁷

³³ <https://liveutk.sharepoint.com/sites/DepartmentofBehavioralSciences/SitePages/SWRK-About.aspx>

³⁴ <https://tennessee.edu/mission-statements/#:~:text=Serving%20all%20Tennesseans%20and%20beyond.social%20and%20environmental%20well%20being.>

³⁵ <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English#:~:text=The%20primary%20mission%20of%20the.oppressed%2C%20and%20living%20in%20poverty.>

³⁶ <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English#principles>

³⁷ <https://ide.tennessee.edu/>

Existing Programs Offered in Neighboring Regional Institutions

For additional comparison, contiguous State/Regional Institutions highlighted in the chart below compares the number of each state's population and number of MSSW Programs, as well as the number of behavioral health professions and their ratio to each state's population. Although Tennessee is in the middle in the relationship of MSW Programs to their state's population, the ratio of behavioral health professionals to population demonstrates the continued need.

Contiguous State	State Population 2024 ³⁸	Number of MSW Programs ³⁹	Ratio of MSW Programs to Population	Ratio of Behavioral Health Professionals to Population ⁴⁰
ALABAMA	5,143,833	10	1:514,383	1:34,119
ARKANSAS	3,089,060	3	1:1,029,687	Data Unavailable
GEORGIA	11,145,304	7	1:1,592,186	1:32,192
KENTUCKY	4,540,745	9	1:504,527	Data Unavailable
MISSISSIPPI	2,940,452	4	1:735,113	1:177,659
MISSOURI	6,215,144	9	1:690,572	1:31,004
NORTH CAROLINA	10,975,017	13	1:844,232	1:103,048
TENNESSEE	7,204,002	10	1:720,400	1:57,116
VIRGINIA	8,752,297	7	1:1,250,328	1:57,584

³⁸ <https://www.datapandas.org/ranking/states-by-population>

³⁹ <https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/about/directory/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/mental-health-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>