



# COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

*Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education*

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February 10, 2010

The Honorable Ciro Rodriguez  
2351 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Rodriguez:

On behalf of the 3,000 individual members and 650 graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education comprising the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), I am writing to thank you for your leadership in addressing the needs of American veterans and for introducing the *Veterans Health Professionals Education Assistance Act of 2009* (H.R. 4166), which would enhance and support the veterans health professions workforce, including social workers.

In particular, we would like to thank you for reauthorizing and broadening the eligibility of the Veterans Health Professionals Educational Assistance Scholarship Program to now include social workers and other mental health professionals. With the increasing prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) being diagnosed among our Nation's veterans, there has never been a more important time to enhance the mental health workforce and services provided to veterans.

For this same reason, we are pleased that your bill proposes to further modify the Scholarship Program by requiring that program graduates receive assistance with respect to gaining employment in the VA system, requires mandatory clinical tours for scholarship recipients, and requires that mentors be assigned to each participant. This will undoubtedly help to ensure that the health professionals serving our veterans are well-trained and best-equipped to serve the unique needs of veterans.

Lastly, CSWE would like to thank you for provisions within H.R. 4166 that would expand the existing Health and Human Services loan repayment program for health professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds and the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program to include work within the Department of Veterans Affairs as obligated service under each program. As social work educators, it is up to us to foster a workforce that is robust, sustainable, and culturally competent, including competency with respect to veteran populations. Your support for these loan forgiveness and scholarship programs will help us substantially in our efforts to train, recruit and retain social workers working within the VA.

Again, thank you for your leadership and efforts with regard to advancing the veterans health professions workforce. We look forward to working with you and your staff in the coming year as the House and Senate negotiates final veteran health care legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julia M. Watkins'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia M. Watkins, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Council on Social Work Education

**For more information, visit [www.CSWE.org](http://www.CSWE.org) or contact:**

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