



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

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OFFICE OF THE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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James F. O'Sullivan
Sr. Program Officer
The John A. Hartford Foundation
55 East 59th Street 16th Floor
New York, NY 10022-1713

Dear Jim,

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), I am pleased to provide this letter outlining CSWE's commitment to the goals and recommended programs of the recently released National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine (IOM) report entitled, *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce* (2008). This report focuses our attention on the requirements and the challenges for a growing national workforce to serve the needs of a rapidly expanding aging population. We are hopeful this report will serve as a catalyst for policy directions that will move our country forward to address this very serious workforce challenge. CSWE fully intends to leverage the report's recommendations in our own efforts to promote enhancement of the U.S. workforce dedicated to serving an expanding aging population in America.

The IOM report was released at an opportune time for CSWE, as we have been considering many of these issues for some time. In particular, over the past several months CSWE has been engaged in a number of activities that are clearly in line with the recommendations of the IOM report through a new commitment to enhance our role in the processes of public policy development and implementation. Since January 2008, CSWE has been working with Lewis-Burke Associates LLC, a Washington, DC based government relations firm specializing in higher education and non-profit science policy, to assist in identifying public policy priorities and goals for the organization. The result of this collaboration is a federal public policy agenda for CSWE that focuses on issues important to social work education and maintaining a sustainable social work workforce, such as education accessibility, student retention, and financial assistance and other incentives that draw more students into the social work profession. This work will be of benefit to students interested in geriatric social work and will also benefit from the higher profile provided to aging by the IOM report.

Securing financial incentives, namely loan forgiveness, to attract more students into the social work pipeline is a primary focus of the CSWE agenda. One bill that CSWE has gone on record to support this year is the Caring for an Aging America Act of 2008 (S. 2708), which was introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) in the spring. Consistent with the recommendations made in the IOM report, the Boxer bill would provide loan forgiveness to help attract and retain health care professionals, including social workers, dedicated to providing care to older Americans. Additionally, the bill would create a Health and Long-term Care Workforce Advisory Panel which would be tasked with advising the federal government on a regular basis on the workforce needs of the nation with respect to the aging population. While

the bill is not perfect from our perspective, CSWE is proud to be listed among the more than 30 national organizations and associations that endorse the bill and will continue to work toward its passage. In addition, CSWE is committed to working toward passage of additional legislation that may emerge that would implement the recommendations made within the IOM report and thereby strengthen the social work workforce.

Although CSWE plans to leverage the recommendations made by the IOM in future public policy endeavors with the Congress through legislation, we also intend to call such recommendations to the attention of the next Presidential Administration. This will be done through a memorandum currently being developed and addressed to the transition teams of the two leading Presidential candidates that outlines what CSWE sees as the needs for the future of the social work profession and recommendations for addressing various social challenges, such as aging. The memorandum will, among other things, address the needs of aging America and call for a commitment by the next President to invest in a sustainable and skilled social work workforce. These recommendations will likely touch on issues of education, training, diversity, and accessibility. CSWE will be engaged in this activity throughout the summer months.

Finally, CSWE is exploring ways to leverage the IOM report in addition to policy changes at the federal level. For example, the report may provide a means for building a bridge between social work education and social work licensing. Through its Hartford Foundation funded Gero-Education Center, CSWE has been working to get gerontological social workers involved in the development of social work licensing exams. For example, we have provided sample exam questions that test for competency in social work practice with an aging population. We have been successful in establishing an open dialogue with the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) on the intersection of education and regulation—both with important quality assurance components for social work with older clients. We are encouraged that the IOM report might provide an additional opportunity to work more closely with exam developers in crafting questions specific to the aging population.

In closing, I would like to reiterate CSWE's support for the IOM *Retooling for an Aging America* report. We recognize the very important role of our social work educational programs in preparing an appropriate and well-qualified workforce for an Aging America. We believe that we in social work education are well-positioned to move this important agenda forward in collaboration with others who share a similar commitment. We will be very pleased to continue our current collaboration with the Hartford Foundation as we all work to implement the recommendations of the IOM report. If at any time I can provide additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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

cc: Ira Colby, PhD, President, Council on Social Work Education
Nancy Hooyman, PhD, University of Washington School of Social Work,
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