



# COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK  
*Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education*

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The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman, Committee on Education  
and the Workforce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable George Miller  
Ranking Member, Committee on Education  
and the Workforce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Higher  
Education and Workforce Training  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ruben Hinojosa  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Higher  
Education and Workforce Training  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

July 26, 2013

Dear Chairman Kline, Representative Miller, Chairwoman Foxx, and Representative Hinojosa:

Thank you for allowing the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to provide input to the Committee in preparation for the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*.

As you may know, CSWE is a nonprofit national association representing more than 2,500 individual members and more than 700 master's and baccalaureate programs of professional social work education. Founded in 1952, this partnership of educational and professional institutions, social welfare agencies, and private citizens is the sole accrediting body for social work education in the United States. Social work education prepares students for leadership and professional interdisciplinary practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities in a wide array of service sectors, including health, mental health, adult and juvenile justice, PK-12 education, child welfare, aging, and others. Social work practice is facilitated by a collaborative relationship that empowers people to be healthy, productive, contributing members of their communities.

CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA) is responsible for developing accreditation standards that define competent preparation and ensuring that social work programs meet them. In accordance with the requirements of CSWE's recognition body, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the CSWE Office of Social Work Accreditation (OSWA) administers a multistep accreditation process that involves program self-studies, site visits, and COA reviews. As you examine the very important areas of transparency and student outcomes, we hope you will consider CSWE to be a good model of transparency and consumer information for students. CSWE accredited programs are high quality and our students get jobs after graduation.

As a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) we support and join with the broader comments submitted by those associations. CSWE would also like to provide comments on three specific areas of interest to our programs and our students within the *Higher Education Act*:

1. Support and strengthen Public Service Loan Forgiveness
2. Issues surrounding program integrity and affirming the independent role of accreditors
3. Inclusion of social work in "Areas of National Need"



**(1) Public Service Loan Forgiveness:**

CSWE applauds the Public Services Loan Forgiveness program, created in the 2008 reauthorization, which is essential to encouraging graduates to go into non-profit, public service, where there is a high-need for social workers. There is a high need for social workers in many areas, but the fastest growing area is in the area of the growing aging population.

Student assistance programs and policies are crucial for social workers who complete years of schooling, sometimes carrying a high student loan debt, in order to serve the public good in positions that regularly provide low wages. According to a survey of Masters in Social Work (MSW) graduates from 25 states, more than a quarter of respondents owed at least \$40,000 related to earning their MSW degrees. About 30 percent had borrowed at least \$30,000 of their total college education debt.<sup>i</sup> These programs were created to encourage students to consider public service, without the crippling concern of high debt and low wages.

We encourage the Committee to work with the Department to encourage non-profit accreditors and others to work with institutions to inform students about this important program, especially in high need/ low salary fields like social work. CSWE would support new programs created in the reauthorization that could encourage greater outreach and education about public service loan forgiveness. This would also support the Committee's interest in empowering students as consumers in higher education; simplify and improve the student aid and loan programs; and increase college accessibility, affordability and completion.

**(2) Issues of program integrity and affirming the independence of accreditors:**

In 2011, CSWE, along with CHEA and other accreditors, weighed in with Congress and the U.S. Department of Education regarding the proposed regulations surrounding program integrity, specifically the definition of a credit hour. In part, CSWE and CHEA argued that "by establishing a federal definition of a credit hour, the regulation opens the door to inappropriate federal interference in the core academic decisions surrounding curriculum." In addition, CSWE and CHEA believed it would pose challenges to accreditors as they would need to develop or revise policies to review an institutions definition of a credit hour." CSWE remains opposed to federal efforts to create one definition of credit hour, which would hinder academic freedom and create additional regulations for accreditors and institutions of higher education. We also urge the Committee to use this reauthorization to reaffirm the important and independent role accreditors serve in ensuring academic excellence and quality.

**(3) Include social work in "Areas of National Need":**

The Department of Education operates the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program, which is also authorized under the Higher Education Act. GAANN provides fellowships, through academic departments of institutions of higher education, to assist graduate students to pursue courses of study designated as an area of national need.<sup>ii</sup> In the most recent competition (in fiscal year 2012), areas of national need included: area studies; biological sciences/ life sciences; chemistry; computer and information sciences; engineering; foreign languages and literatures; mathematics; nursing; physics; and education evaluation, research, and statistics.



There is a growing need for social workers in many fields including school counselors, social workers serving on tribal lands, and the growing population of Veterans, to name a few. In a recent report to Congress on the behavioral health care workforce, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) said that at least 10% to 20% more mental health and addiction treatment professionals are needed by 2018.<sup>iii</sup> However, the need for social workers can be best demonstrated in the growing older population of U.S. citizens and how social workers are utilized in their care. By the year 2050, one out of every seven people in the world will be 65 years or older. Those over age 65 will double to more than 70 million by the year 2030, which means 20% of the U.S. population—greater than the percentage of elders in Florida today. Significant to issues of social justice, and the population with the greatest need for social workers, the number of those over age 85—elders with the highest rates of chronic illness, poverty, and living alone—is expected to quintuple to more than 19 million by 2050.

The need for social workers with geriatric knowledge, skills, and values is escalating. There is currently a need for an additional 55,000 social workers, and by 2050, that need is expected to grow to approximately 109,000.<sup>iv</sup>

With an aging population and more people generally seeking healthcare and social services, the need for additional social workers is increasing. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that employment for social workers is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2020, particularly for healthcare social workers and mental health and substance abuse social workers, which are projected to increase by 34 and 31 percent, respectively, over the decade of 2010 through 2020.<sup>v</sup> Because of this great need, the Committee should include social workers in any and all programs within the reauthorization that address “areas of national need,” including GAANN and other programs.

### Conclusion

CSWE looks forward to working with the Committee as you begin your important work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. I hope that you will call on CSWE as a resource as you begin your discussions surrounding the reauthorization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Darla Spence Coffey'.

Darla Spence Coffey, President and Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Congressional Social Work Caucus

<sup>i</sup> Source: CSWE (2011). *2011 Annual Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States*, pp. 12-13. Available at <http://www.cswe.org/CentersInitiatives/DataStatistics/ProgramData.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Source: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gaann/index.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Source: SAMHSA (2013). *SAMHSA Report To Congress On The Nation's Substance Abuse And Mental Health Workforce Issues*. Available at <http://www.openminds.com/library/012413samhsabhworkforce.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> Source: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/2006/SWsupply.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Source: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm>