



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



National Association of Social Workers

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C., 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and  
Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C., 20510

July 20, 2015

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to you on behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to encourage you to maintain federal support for programs critical to protecting the public service safety net, and ensuring the recruitment and retention of social workers in the United States. As the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions considers reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), we urge you to protect the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) and income-driven repayment plans within the HEA for our programs and our students.

Our communities are experiencing a greater need for social workers in areas such as mental and behavioral health, health-care, child welfare, and in other social service sectors. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for social workers, particularly for social workers specializing in work with the aging population and work in rural areas, is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2022. PSLF and income-driven repayment plans are essential to recruit students to pursue degrees in social work and help those students graduating from social work programs enter into public service.

In addition, 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 lower wages than other professions. 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 due to their MSW studies. Approximately 30 percent of respondents had borrowed at least \$30,000 of their total college education debt. Student assistance programs help counteract these trends and encourage students to consider public service, without the crippling concern of high debt and low wages. Furthermore, these programs often help students from disadvantaged backgrounds provide public service to the communities where they live. As we encourage more graduates to go into non-profit and public service where there is a high-need for social workers, CSWE and NASW strongly support the PSLF program and income-driven repayment plans.

We understand the fiscal and budgetary constraints facing Congress; however, these programs were enacted because of a great public service need, which still exists today. Investment in these programs

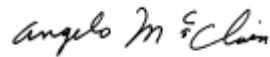
strengthens communities, and the country as a whole. We urge the preservation of these programs and, more specifically, the inclusion of social workers within these programs. We encourage the Committee to consider the importance of PSLF for recruiting social work students and retaining social workers in the field. Any threats to eliminate this critical program are of high concern to our membership and to the future of the field of social work. Such changes would have detrimental effects on students graduating from social work programs who wish to serve in high-needs communities, often at a low salary level.

As we discuss HEA reauthorization, we would be remiss if we did not thank you for your focus on increasing college accessibility, affordability, and completion. CSWE and NASW look forward to working with your offices as you begin your important work to reauthorize the HEA. Please know that we are available to be a resource to you on this issue, or other issues facing the Committee as it pursues HEA reauthorization.

Sincerely,



Darla Spence Coffey  
President and Chief Executive Officer, CSWE



Angelo McClain  
Chief Executive Officer, NASW

*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. CSWE's primary mission is to advance social work education and ensure quality through its Commission on Accreditation (the sole accrediting body for social work education in the United States). NASW represents 132,000 social workers to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. Together, we represent social workers at all stages of their educations and careers to ensure a well-educated social work profession that is prepared to succeed in practice, in the workforce, and in society.*