



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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

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Mary K. Wakefield, PhD, RN, Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Marc Garufi, Chief
Public Health Branch
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Re: FY 2012 Budget for HRSA's Health Professions Programs

Dear Dr. Wakefield and Mr. Garufi:

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and its sister social work education organizations listed below, I am writing to urge you to include first time funding in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 President's Budget for critical programs authorized in the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (P.L. 111-148) earlier this year. In particular, CSWE asks that you include **\$35 million** for the newly authorized **Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants program**, which will be administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

CSWE is a nonprofit national association representing more than 3,000 individual members as well as 650 graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education. Founded in 1952, this partnership of educational and professional institutions, social welfare agencies, and private citizens is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States. Social work education focuses students on leadership and direct practice roles helping individuals, families, groups, and communities by creating new opportunities that empower people to be productive, contributing members of their communities.

The Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants program was authorized in Title V, Subtitle D of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. These grants, which would become part of the suite of Title VII and Title VIII Health Professions Programs administered by HRSA, would provide grants to institutions of higher education (schools of social work and other mental health professions) for faculty and student recruitment and professional education and training. **For FY 2012, the law authorizes:**

- **\$8 million for training in social work**
- **\$10 million for child and adolescent mental health training (which includes social work)**
- **\$12 million for graduate psychology training**
- **\$5 million for training for paraprofessionals working with children and adolescents**

We ask that the President's FY 2012 Budget include a total of \$35 million for the Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants program, which would provide first time funding for training grants across these four disciplines.

The impact that full implementation of this program would have on social work and other professions cannot be overstated. Recruitment and retention of social work faculty, students and practitioners is a major challenge plaguing the profession. As the population ages and the demographics of the country shift, we are nearing a certain crisis in terms of the Nation's ability to address the health care needs of the population. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the need for employment of social workers is

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expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2018, particularly for social workers specializing in the aging population and working in rural areas. In addition, the need for mental health and substance abuse social workers is expected to grow by almost 20 percent over the 2008-2018 decade.¹ As you may know, social workers are unique in that they represent the largest providers of mental health therapeutic and counseling services among all of the health professions.

Unfortunately, recruitment into the social work profession faces many obstacles, the most prevalent being low wages coupled with high educational debt. For example, the median annual wage for child, family, and school social workers in May 2008 was \$39,530, while the wage for mental health and substance abuse social workers was \$37,210. In addition, while a bachelor's degree (BSW) is necessary for most entry-level positions, a master's degree (MSW) is the terminal degree for social work practice, which significantly contributes to the debt load of social work graduates entering careers with low starting wages. These difficult realities have made recruitment and retention of social workers an ongoing challenge, and will continue to have significant implications for the future of the health care system and our ability to provide adequate care, particularly in the nation's underserved communities.

Given the largely uncertain and tenuous years that lie ahead, it is critical that we invest today in programs that will best equip those who will be responsible for meeting the health care needs of all Americans. The new Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grants program among the many other valuable Title VII programs at HRSA will help us ensure that our health care workforce is sustainable and adequately trained to meet the challenges before us. This investment of \$35 million in FY 2012 will make an immense impact on the social work profession and the health care workforce over all.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these views. As you make tough decisions about the FY 2012 Budget, we hope you will give the points discussed in this letter due consideration. We believe that social work can play a central role in meeting the health care needs of the nation and look forward to working together in doing so. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or if you would like additional information about CSWE, its sister organizations, social work education, or the request made within this letter.

Sincerely,

Julia M. Watkins
Executive Director, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

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¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition: Social Workers, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/oco/ocos060.htm> (March 2010).