



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

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May 13, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Majority Whip
U.S. Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Majority Leader Reid, and Majority Whip Durbin:

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), I am writing to urge you to bring the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act* (S. 686; H.R. 795) to the House and Senate floors for a vote. This critical legislation, named after two extraordinary leaders in social work and social justice, takes important steps to ensure the future of the profession of social work. What better tribute to these important figures who played such influential roles in the social movements of the last century than by passing the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act*.

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. 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. CSWE enthusiastically endorses the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act* as its passage will undoubtedly contribute to our efforts to educate tomorrow's social workers.

The *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act* takes important steps to ensure the future of the profession of social work. Among other things, this legislation would establish a Social Work Reinvestment Commission to provide independent counsel to federal decision makers on policy issues associated with the recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession of social work and it would authorize grant programs to support demonstration projects related to research, workplace improvements, education, training, and programs of excellence. This bill is an important step towards ensuring that the social work workforce needs of the country are met.

As you may be aware, there are tremendous challenges facing the social work profession, including high educational debt, low salaries, and mounting concerns with job safety. 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. Further, 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. According to the 2007-2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, 72 percent of students graduating from MSW programs incurred debt to earn their graduate degree. The average debt was approximately \$35,500.

These challenges do not take into account the countless other complexities facing the profession and the nation now and in the coming years, such as the increasing workforce needs generated by the growing aging population and the need to provide services to rural communities. 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 2018, particularly for social workers specializing in the aging population and working in rural areas. In addition, mental health and substance abuse social workers are expected to grow by almost 20 percent over the 2008-2018 decade, with social workers specializing in substance abuse experiencing strong demand as people are increasingly placed in treatment programs instead of prison systems. Passage of the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act* is an important step toward addressing these impending crises.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your ongoing leadership and urge your support for the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act*. I hope you will consider bringing this important legislation to the floor for a vote in the very near future.

Sincerely,



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

Cc: The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, sponsor of S. 686
The Honorable Edolphus Towns, sponsor of H.R. 795
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Susan Davis
The Honorable Luis Gutierrez
The Honorable Barbara Lee
The Honorable Ciro Rodriguez
The Honorable Allyson Schwartz
The Honorable Carol Shea-Porter
The Honorable Niki Tsongas