



# COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

*Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education*

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September 17, 2010

Dr. Jill Biden  
Office of Dr. Jill Biden  
Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Dr. Biden,

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), I would like to thank you for your lifelong devotion and dedication to teaching and education. We commend your continued teaching and promotion of the importance and vast benefits of community colleges. As issues related to postsecondary education, including access, persistence, completion, and cost, continue to rise on the national spectrum, we know you have been living and researching these issues for many years and will continue to be a prominent leader as we search for solutions.

In the current economic climate and challenging job market, it is more important than ever for the U.S. to be able to provide a wide range of postsecondary educational opportunities designed to meet the needs of diverse populations, including older and non-traditional students, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals who may not succeed in a traditional four-year college or university. As you continue your work in this area, we would like to offer our assistance in providing information or other resources that may help you to identify new or build on existing policy and programmatic goals.

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. The organization was founded in 1952 and comprises a strong partnership of educational and professional institutions, social welfare agencies, and private citizens. Recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States, CSWE accredits social work degrees at both the baccalaureate (BSW) and master's (MSW) level. 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.

As you may know, there are no two-year degree or certificate programs for the field of social work. Certificates may be awarded as part of a social work program's effort to help practitioners meet continuing education requirements for licensure or as an enhancement to the BSW or MSW, but not as a qualification for a job in a particular position that requires the social work degree. These are not regulated by CSWE. The BSW is the minimum entry level degree required to practice social work and the MSW is accepted as the terminal, advanced practice degree. It is not uncommon for practitioners to continue their education at a higher level, ultimately acquiring a significant amount of debt. Social work continues to be a high-needs profession. Individuals are needed to serve in rural and remote areas; in fields including geriatrics, substance abuse, child and adult protective

services, and mental health; and with high needs populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, Veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

However, CSWE encourages member institutions to identify ways to collaborate with community colleges and two-year programs in related fields, including through articulation agreements with human services programs. The goal of this effort is to increase opportunities for students in (or who wish to enter) those programs to continue their education and advance in a course of study that could lead to practice in a high-need profession.

CSWE is supportive of new efforts relating to community colleges, including additional funding for community colleges through the American Graduation Initiative (AGI). This increased interest and investment in community colleges provides an opportunity to create linkages that can encourage individuals to enter high-need professions—ones that will be increasingly looked to as the Baby Boom generation ages but have historically had difficulty with recruitment and retention—such as social work. While there are no two-year social work programs, we envision that the development of strategic partnerships between community colleges and four-year social work programs, perhaps through cooperative agreements and articulation arrangements, could create such linkages to (1) encourage first-time college students to pursue four-year degrees in a high-need area and (2) help address the major workforce shortage that is plaguing the social work profession.

The example outlined above is just one way in which social work education can help the Obama Administration achieve its goals. It is based on the issues described above that we request to be included in the overall dialogue surrounding community colleges, including participation in the upcoming Community College Summit, which is planned for October 5.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or CSWE's Government Relations Representative Wendy Naus (202-289-7475, [Wendy@lewis-burke.com](mailto:Wendy@lewis-burke.com)) should you have any questions or if any additional information would be helpful.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia M. Watkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia M. Watkins  
Executive Director  
Council on Social Work Education