



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

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April 27, 2012

The Honorable Daniel Akaka
United States Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Akaka:

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), I write to thank you for your dedication to addressing issues of health and health care inequality and specifically for introducing the *Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2012* (HEAA). This important legislation will build upon the many critical programs created in the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA) by making sure that no one is underserved when it comes to their health. While the ACA provides a strong foundation for eliminating racial, ethnic, gender, and other disparities, much was left unaddressed. CSWE is grateful for your leadership with respect to HEAA.

CSWE (www.CSWE.org) is a nonprofit national association representing more than 2,500 individual members, as well as over 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 U.S. 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. Ensuring unhindered access to health care and other necessary services is at the heart of the social work profession.

CSWE is especially pleased about the provisions in HEAA designed to enhance the health professions workforce, including loan repayment and training opportunities. Incentives are desperately needed to nurture well-equipped and culturally competent health professionals to serve diverse communities, especially the mental health needs of diverse populations which continue to be grossly underserved. Reports have shown that ethnic minority mental health professionals practice in underserved areas at a higher rate than non-minorities. Furthermore, a direct positive relationship exists between the numbers of ethnic minority mental health professionals and the utilization of needed services by ethnic minorities.¹

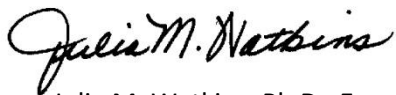
One program included in HEAA does exactly that. The Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) was designed to help reverse the disparities that exist in mental health services and improve the quality of those services to minority populations through the training of additional minority mental health professionals. The program provides stipends to doctoral level students to increase the number of culturally competent

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services. (2001). *Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity—A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/cre/sma-01-3613.pdf>.

behavioral health professionals who teach, administer, conduct services research, and provide direct mental health and substance abuse services to underserved populations. While this is not a new program in HEAA, CSWE is pleased that the bill would authorize it for the very first time. The MFP is a successful model for creating a workforce to meet the unique needs of diverse populations.

Thank you for your work on the *Health Equity and Accountability Act*. CSWE looks forward to working with you and your dedicated staff in support of efforts to address the needs of underserved communities across the nation. Please do not hesitate to call on me if CSWE can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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

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