



## CSWE Principles for a Higher Education Act Reauthorization

Social work education, and higher education in general, must be accessible and affordable to students if we are to prepare a workforce capable of advancing social and economic justice. Schools and programs of social work are preparing a pipeline of professionals to serve in a number of capacities that promote health, well-being, and justice for all people in a diverse society. Social work professionals are working in a diverse array of settings including behavioral health care, child welfare, schools, hospitals, local social services agencies, and with veterans across the United States, just to name a few. Higher education is essential to ensuring the continued development of this essential workforce. As policymakers work to update the Higher Education Act (HEA), CSWE supports the following principles to ensure accessibility, affordability, and quality.

- **Higher Education Must Be Accessible and Affordable:** The need for postsecondary education in today's economy is undeniable. Increasing costs, however, make that a difficult reality for many students. CSWE supports doubling the maximum Pell award and indexing the maximum Pell Grant to inflation. Policies such as loan forgiveness as part of income-based repayment plans, programs such as Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and other student aid programs help increase access for low-income students and should be bolstered via an HEA reauthorization.
- **Allow Accreditors to Focus on Educational Quality and Removing Barriers That Inhibit Quality:** The federal government has long relied on accreditors to assure the quality of higher education. The role of the federal government has been to enforce the rules and regulations related to student aid. CSWE strongly supports this division and encourages higher education legislation to continue this practice. Because institutional accreditors are responsible for ensuring that federal funds go to quality institutions, it is reasonable to have federal oversight of this process. Most programmatic accreditors, however, do not have a role in determining whether an institution is eligible to participate in the federal student aid programs under the HEA. CSWE supports legislative language in HEA that would assure that programmatic accreditors are exempt from federal regulations as they relate to accreditation. This will allow CSWE to focus on ensuring the highest professional standards, leaves control to the academic accrediting community, and accounts for institutional diversity.
- **Protect the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program:** The PSLF program was created in 2007 to encourage students to pursue public service careers. Eligible public service employees include teachers, police officers, firefighters, social workers, and nurses, among a variety of other professions. To qualify for forgiveness under PSLF, borrowers who enter full-time employment at qualifying public service organizations must make 120 on-time monthly payments—which total 10 years of payments—while enrolled in a qualified repayment plan. Additionally, for professions such as social work in which wages are often lower when compared to other professions, PSLF encourages professionals to pursue opportunities in critical high-needs areas. Social workers provide invaluable service, very often public service, to society. Recognizing this service through programs such as PSLF will allow more students to pursue the profession and achieve important financial milestones in their own lives. An HEA reauthorization should ensure that the PSLF program is easy to navigate and should potentially support loan forgiveness before 10 years.
- **Recognize the Important Role of Graduate Education:** Graduate education is vital to professions that serve communities throughout the United States, including social work. A master's degree in

*CSWE is a national association of social work education programs and individuals that ensures and enhances the quality of social work education for a professional practice that promotes individual, family, and community well-being, and social and economic justice.*



social work is required for areas of specialized practice (such as behavioral health and substance abuse). An HEA reauthorization should expand Pell Grant eligibility to graduate education. Additionally, in light of the continuing demand for social workers to assist with mental health, substance-use disorders, and aging populations, social work programs should be designated for inclusion in the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need program.

- ***Ensure Efforts to Address Campus Sexual Assault Are Effective:*** The continued attention to sexual harassment in the workplace parallels the issues campuses have long had with campus sexual assault. CSWE firmly believes that students and vulnerable populations should be protected and believes that social workers as professionals are often equipped to provide support in this area. Higher education legislation should ensure that students have access to trained professionals such as social workers and psychologists when addressing the issue of sexual assault on campus.
- ***Acknowledge the Intersection of Professional Competencies and Institutional Mission:*** A strength of the higher education system in the United States is the diversity of its institutions. Social work requires the ability to engage diversity and difference. This can lead to instances in which institutional mission can conflict with professional competencies. CSWE supports higher education policies that recognize that institutional mission should not trump professional competencies, especially as it relates to programmatic accreditation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact CSWE's government relations consultant, Otto Katt ([otto@lewis-burke.com](mailto:otto@lewis-burke.com)).

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