

**Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work
Reinvestment Act (H.R. 795/S. 686)
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Good morning. I am Mit Joyner, President of the Council on Social Work Education and Department Chair of the Undergraduate Social Work program at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. I am pleased to join you today to discuss social work, social work education, and the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act. I want to echo Dr. Clark's expression of gratitude to Congressman Towns, the sponsor of this legislation and a proud social worker.

As an educator, administrator, and practitioner, I want to highlight the unique role that social workers play in the lives of individuals of all ages and from all walks of life, and how social work education prepares the workforce for the large task before us.

Social work is rooted in a tradition of social justice and serves in a variety of capacities, such as case management, counseling, the medical field, social welfare, community organizing, education, and research. Therefore, social workers are embedded in schools, hospitals, VA facilities, rehabilitation centers, social service agencies, child welfare organizations, assisted living centers, nursing homes, and faith-based organizations, which allow us to reach diverse segments of the population and play a significant role in the lives of Americans. We are the first to respond helping vulnerable populations or individuals deal with a given challenge. But social workers also strive to keep populations healthy and productive over the longer-term by helping all citizens make good decisions for themselves and their families. In essence, social workers are helping all populations navigate and overcome the challenges in their everyday lives, helping not just the vulnerable or the sick, but anyone who has experienced some kind of trauma, hardship or injustice, even some of you who sit here today.

However, 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. It is absolutely critical that all social workers are equipped with the skills and understanding needed to ensure that the unique diversity that our nation enjoys does not translate into uneven care for its citizens. Cultural competency is key; and that is something that social workers are educated to understand and promote.

I am here today representing the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). CSWE is a nonprofit national association representing more than 3,000 individual members and 650 graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education. We are also the sole accrediting agency for baccalaureate and master's level social work programs in the U.S., which means we support academic excellence by establishing standards that allow students to realize professional competency. Approximately 60,000 students are enrolled in social work programs each year under the direction and guidance of about 7,000 to 8,000 faculty nationwide.

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. In order to claim the title of "social worker," individuals must have a bachelor's, masters, or doctorate degree in social work. This skill set lends itself well to not only direct practice, but also to leading social service agencies, working on policy making at the state and federal level such as Congressmen Town,

and other social workers in congress Participating in leading edge social work research that informs practice is central to our mission.

Social workers really are heroes in the field, as we work are on the front line to selflessly to better the lives of other people while often making very little money and with few supports of their own. The profession is currently reaching a breaking point with recruitment and retention of social work faculty, students and practioners posing a major challenge, despite the increasing demand for services. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the need for employment of 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, the need for mental health and substance abuse social workers is expected to grow by almost 20 percent over the 2008-2018 decade. Unfortunately, recruitment into the social work profession faces many obstacles, the most prevalent being low wages coupled with high educational debt. We desperately need mechanisms in place that ensure our students—who are looking to a career that is focused on helping others—will be able to make ends meet, support their families, and pay off their educational debt.

Allow me to illustrate just a few of the ways social workers are impacting the lives of millions of people and why further investment is needed:

- **Health** – Social work exists at the nexus of human behavior and outcomes for health. Social workers are the largest providers of mental health services in the country and deliver caregiver, family, health counseling, and mental health therapy to the quarter of

the American population suffering from diagnosable mental health issues, including Asperger Syndrome, and Autism. Health care and medical social workers will be indispensable as we navigate the new health care system, working with individuals and their families to adapt to health circumstances, provide counseling, and act as liaisons between patients and their medical teams.

- **Education** – Social workers work within schools and with families to assist students in reaching their highest educational potential, and social work research investigates how best to do that such as counseling young children through adolescents who are victims of cyber bullying. . In addition to our work in schools, social work educators are preparing the next generation of social workers and researchers for leadership and direct practice roles helping individuals, families, groups, and communities. Social work education evidence-based approach will improve teaching and learning; that is, developing effective instruction based on the outcomes of social work research.
- **Children and the Aging Population** – More than half a million children are living in the U.S. foster care system. Research shows professional social workers in child welfare agencies are most likely to find permanent homes for children in foster care for two or more years. Additionally, by 2020, one in six Americans are projected to be age 65 and older, with the most dramatic growth among those over 85, elders of color, and women. These demographic changes profoundly shape every aspect of our society, including the growing demand for social workers with gerontological competencies helping those helping those with Alzheimer's and their families . Social work education is working to

better equip our workforce by promoting gerontological competencies at the generalist level for all social work students, as well as specialized gerontological practice behaviors at the advanced level.

- **America's Veterans and Wounded Warriors** – Well over one million veterans have returned or will return from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many with post-traumatic stress, depression, and drug and alcohol addiction. Countless others simply need help accessing the services and benefits they have earned, such as educational and housing benefits. Social workers provide these combat veterans and their loved ones with mental health interventions, housing and financial consulting, case management, advocacy services and suicide prevention.

As I have just described in these few examples, that reach and impact of social work is vast and its charge is tall. We are here today to talk about “reinvestment” in social work. The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is a first step in the reinvestment process that is so desperately needed for our profession. Like teachers, nurses, medical doctor's and so many other critical professionals, social workers are necessary for the healthy functioning of our society. We can provide preventative services and save money in the process. We can address challenges at the individual, community, or societal levels before widespread negative repercussions are felt. Passing this legislation into law is a simple step that would have extraordinary benefits for 640,000 social workers in the United States and, But most importantly, the millions of people we serve every day.

Thank you.