

**Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work
Reinvestment Act (H.R. 795/S. 686)
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Remarks Submitted By:

**Joan Levy Zlotnik, PhD, ACSW
Director
Social Work Policy Institute
NASW Foundation
750 First Street NE, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20002-4241
(202) 336-8393
jzlotnik@naswdc.org**

Good morning, I am Joan Levy Zlotnik, Director of the Social Work Policy Institute in the NASW Foundation. I am pleased to be able to speak with you today and I too want to thank Congressman Towns, not only for his introduction and leadership in moving forward the **Dorothy I. Height/Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act**, but also because he continues to identify himself as a social worker.

In a profession that is often misunderstood and undervalued, it is critical that our leaders who are social workers identify themselves as such, for so many of us are in positions where it is easy to be called by another title.

I would like to take this opportunity to reinforce the information that my distinguished colleagues have provided this morning and to reiterate the importance of the passage of this legislation, not only for current and future social workers, but also for the millions of individuals, families, and communities that are helped by social workers each year.

The mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. **THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE THE LEAST ABLE TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES** – and social workers make a difference in their lives.

A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society.

The formal social work profession is just a little over 100 years old. And it is unique -- because it combines social workers who make our world a better place in many different ways. There are the social workers who are involved in front-line direct practice, providing counseling and care coordination services, helping people actualize their full potential and to cope with life's adversities – working in child welfare, in hospitals and other health care settings, in mental health programs, and in the military, for example. The Department of Veterans Affairs is in fact the largest single largest employer of Master's level social workers.

There are also social workers like Congressman Towns, Senators Mikulski and Stabenow, Congressmen Ciro Rodriguez, Luis Guterrez and Congresswomen Barbara Lee, Susan Davis, Allyson Schwartz and Carol Shea-Porter, and colleagues like them in state legislatures and county councils and in government agencies across the country - who are engaged in policy-making, helping to create and implement programs and policies that enhance health and well-being.

There are social workers who place themselves in harm's way to do their job, whether as a military social worker deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan or posted to the hospital at Fort Hood, or as a social worker making a home visit to a family in trouble. There are the school social workers who see the changing demographics in their communities and bring together families, community leaders and school administrators to develop programs for the students and their families, and work to have the school be a place to build community, and so that families can learn and grow together and become financially self-sufficient.

There are social workers who are researchers, working to solve some of our nation's most intractable social and health problems. Social work researchers have developed cost effective interventions for young Latina women who have had a positive screen for breast cancer, to make sure that they go back and get a follow-up mammogram; or have helped family caregivers reduce their isolation in caring for a family member with Alzheimer's Disease through the use of the computer; or have reduced re-hospitalization through telephone follow-up from a social worker; or have worked to help people in poverty acquire Individual Development Accounts as a way out of poverty; or have developed interventions to prevent and reduce child neglect, the most prevalent type of child maltreatment.

Furthermore, the continued concerns about health disparities; the linkages between poverty and health, educational and social outcomes; and the need for research on the implementation of social interventions in complex systems and with diverse communities and settings drives the need for more sophisticated research studies. The social work profession is uniquely positioned to be a catalyst for transporting research to practice and to developing practice-based research questions.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that the social work profession faces today is that its value to society, to the individuals, families and communities it serves, and sometimes to social workers ourselves— is undervalued and in some ways devalued. Many of the programs and services provided by social workers are dependent on public funding, even when carried out under non-profit and private auspices. In some instances they might be paid for through insurance and there are some funds coming from the voluntary sector and from religious

institutions. Entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid and Child Welfare Services are the critical safety net for our most vulnerable. Yet there continue to be unmet service needs and we have a shortage of social workers ready to take on difficult tasks, often with low salaries and high caseloads and with insufficient supervision and training. The current economic crisis and the cutbacks in many states and localities has exacerbated this – as need has grown the pool of available services and providers has shrank.

Thus, for the profession we have a three-fold problem that the Social Work Reinvestment Commission, the Workplace Improvement Grants, the Education and Training Grants, the Community-based Programs of Excellence and the Research support in the Social Work Reinvestment Act can begin to address. We need to attract people to social work, we need to provide them with excellent education and training, and we need to ensure that we have incentives and working conditions – including competitive salaries, manageable workloads, learning organizations and supervisory and peer support so that they stay in the profession.

We need to attract the best and the brightest who will work with foster children, or with parents who abuse their children or with our growing aging population or with persons with intellectual, mental and physical disabilities, or with the soldiers and veterans who have served our country. We need to better understand what are the incentives that will bring in the needed numbers of social workers to double our ranks in the next decade – Is it stipends, loan forgiveness, higher salary, tuition waivers, and/or better public recognition of the important role that social workers have in our societal well-being? It is probably All of the Above!

We need to ensure that we have a sufficient supply of social work faculty in BSW programs, MSW programs and to teach doctoral students, across this country. Currently doctoral students are in short supply and there are almost no funding sources specifically to attract and educate social work doctoral students to support their education, unlike in medicine and in nursing. We need to ensure that we are doing and using research to inform practice and creating linkages between the research and practice communities and that our curricula are up to date and in synch with the changing practice environment.

As you can see, our society and the social work profession has its challenges set out for us. We look forward to continuing our work with Congressman Towns and ask those of you in attendance today to complete the postcards that we have brought here today to help see this vision that Dr. Height felt was so important, to move forward with the **Dorothy I. Height/Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act.**

Thank you for this opportunity.