

Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act (H.R. 1106 & S. 584 – 112th Congress) Important Points

Request: Cosponsor the Social Work Reinvestment Act and actively work to ensure that it is passed into law.

1. The social work profession is society's social safety net.

- Professional social workers provide essential services to individuals across the lifespan and have long been the workforce to guide people to critical resources, counsel them on important life decisions, and help them reach their full potential. **Social workers are society's safety net, and with our current economic challenges, this safety net has grown to include and protect a diverse group of people from all walks of life.** Professional social workers have the unique expertise and experience that will enable them to help solve the social and economic challenges that our nation is facing.

Supporting Points (Pick one of these areas, or another area, that your Representative and/or Senators are interested in).

- The United States **economy** has faced formidable obstacles since 2008 and social workers have been the workforce to assist people who are struggling with joblessness and economic insecurity.
- Well over one million **veterans** will return from Iraq and Afghanistan, many with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and drug and alcohol addiction. Social workers provide these combat veterans with mental health interventions, housing and financial consulting, case management, and advocacy services.
- The **aging baby boom** is going to require rapidly increasing social work services. There are currently 30,000 social workers practicing in gerontology. Over 70,000 were needed in 2010.
- Social workers provide services to the one in eight American adults suffering from **dementia** and their families.
- Social workers provide caregiver, family, health counseling, and mental health therapy to the quarter of the American population suffering from diagnosable **mental illness**.
- More than half a million children are living in the US **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. Unfortunately, fewer than 40% of child welfare case workers are professional social workers.
- **Health care and medical** social workers help individuals and their families adapt to health circumstances, provide grief counseling, and act as liaisons between patients and their medical teams for the 1.5 million new cases of cancer reported annually, 1.5 million people receiving hospice care, and 1 million Americans living with HIV or AIDS.
- Every 11 seconds a high school student drops out and every second a student is suspended from school. The **high school drop-out rate** is 8% and in certain vulnerable communities is over 50%. Social workers in school settings help at-risk students through early identification, prevention, intervention, counseling, and support.
- More than 650,000 **ex-offenders** are released from prison annually. Social workers address disproportionate minority incarceration rates, provide treatment for mental health problems and drug and alcohol addictions, and work to reduce recidivism and increase positive community reentry.

2. Workforce Challenges such as serious safety concerns, significant educational debt, and comparatively insufficient salaries are threatening the ability of our nation's social workers to provide these indispensable services.

Supporting Points

- Our nation's social workers are facing **daunting challenges** such as severity of client problems, size of caseload, lack of social work supervision, decrease in job security, reimbursement levels, and increases in paperwork that compromise their ability to provide essential services and necessary care.
- **Social Work salaries are incomparable to similar professions such as nursing.** According to a 2006 study by the NASW Center for Workforce Studies, median salaries of social workers range from a high of \$55,129 among those working both full-time and part-time social work jobs to a low of \$24,067 among those working only part-time social work jobs.
- Social workers who earn lower salaries are more likely to work in challenging environments and to serve more vulnerable clients. They are also more likely to leave the profession.
- **Social work educational debt is untenable.** According to one study by the Council on Social Work Education, 68% of individuals who held a Master's Degree in Social Work graduated with an average debt of \$26,777.
- Social workers often deal with the most vulnerable clients in emotional or traumatic situations and face possible danger as a result. Almost 45% of social workers reported that they faced personal safety issues on the job.
- Contrasted with the **increasing need** for more social workers to address the mounting needs of individuals, families and communities, 12% **plan to leave the workforce** in the next two years.
- There is already a **significant shortage** of professional social workers in the fields of aging and child welfare. This shortage will increase as the baby boomers continue to age. Additionally, many of the more complex economic and policy challenges facing the nation such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security cannot be addressed adequately without assessing the immediate and long-term challenges facing the workforce that will be tasked with providing these vital support services. This legislation is designed to address these challenges to the profession, thereby helping to ensure that millions of constituents in communities throughout the nation can continue to receive competent care.
- **Left unaddressed**, these challenges will result in a decreased social work profession unable to provide comprehensive service to underserved communities, leaving millions of people without adequate social service care and support.

3. The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is designed to address these challenges to the profession, thereby helping to ensure that millions of individuals and families throughout the nation can continue to receive competent care. This legislation will create the foundation for a professional workforce to meet the ever-increasing demand for the essential services that social workers provide.

Supporting Points

- The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act was reintroduced into Congress by Rep. Ed Towns and Senator Mikluski on World Social Work Day, March 15, 2011.
- The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is an effort to **review the current workforce shortage challenges, determine how those challenges will affect the many communities that social workers serve, and better understand the overwhelming need for reinvestment into the profession of social work.**
- SWRA will also create a **Reinvestment Commission** to provide independent advice and counsel to Congress on policy issues association with the recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession of social work.
- SWRA will fund **demonstration grants** to address relevant, "on the ground" realities experienced by our nation's social workers. These competitive grant programs will prioritize activities in the areas of workplace improvements, research, education and training, and community-based programs of excellence. **This investment will be returned many times over both in support of ongoing efforts to establish the most effective social work solutions and in direct service to the growing numbers of individuals, families, and communities in need.**