



National Association of Social Workers
Social Work Caucus Launch Event

March 15, 2011

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH

Executive Director

Remarks

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, I would like to welcome all of you who have joined us today. This is an important and exciting moment for the social work profession, as we witness the launch of the Congressional Social Work Caucus. We appreciate you coming together to show your support.

We are most grateful to our good friend, Congressman Ed Towns, for the initiative he has taken to create this caucus. Congressman Towns is a professional social worker, an ordained Baptist minister, and a 14-term veteran in the House of Representatives. We are lucky to have him serve as Chairman of the caucus and appreciate his continual commitment to the social work profession. We also want to thank the Congressman's staff for the time they have devoted to making the caucus a reality.

We'd like to acknowledge all of the social worker Members of Congress, many of whom join us today, as they will be critical to the success of this caucus.

Congresswoman Susan Davis from California

Congressman Luis Gutierrez from Illinois

Congresswoman Barbara Lee from California

Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz from Pennsylvania

Congresswoman Niki Tsongas from Massachusetts

We are proud of our social work leaders in Congress, and look forward to seeing the good work of this caucus being used by social work students, professionals, researchers, professors, policy makers, and the general public.

We are also grateful to the numerous Members of Congress who have worked in social service agencies and non-profit organizations throughout their careers. We invite any Members with an interest in the profession of social work, the services provided by social workers, or the 10 million clients served by social workers each day, to join and contribute to this caucus.

This caucus is being created at a time of considerable change for our nation, and of critical importance for the profession. Social workers have expected a significant demographic change for quite some time, with the aging baby boom generation requiring increasing demand for their services. Additionally, the worst economic recession many of us have ever witnessed has renewed the need for a strong and stable social safety net, in which social workers are an essential component.

This caucus will bring attention to challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality that individuals and communities currently face. Social workers provide services every day that are necessary for the health and wellness of our nation.

This caucus will bring Members of Congress together to discuss relevant and timely topics, and focus on the vital contributions of social workers in areas such as mental health, child welfare, and health care, and social workers who are part of other organizations, corporations, and legislatures across the country.

In fact, it is unlikely that any headline in the news will not have a repercussion for the social work profession and the clients we serve. Issues such as childhood obesity, bullying, or violence are examples of some of our current national challenges, which often involve the intervention of a social worker. This caucus could not have been formed at a better time.

We also want to use this opportunity to announce that Congressman Ed Towns and Senator Barbara Mikulski have reintroduced the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act today. They have both been advocates for the social work profession and we thank them for that. They consistently use their positions of power for the greater good of society.

The Social Work Reinvestment Act was important when it was first introduced in the 110th Congress, but it is needed now more than ever. Many of the workforce challenges within the social work profession will be addressed once this legislation passes into law. These workforce challenges such as low salaries, high educational debt, and serious safety concerns, if not tackled, will result in a workforce that cannot possibly keep pace with increasing demand for services. The social safety net will disappear, and our nation will suffer without an ample supply of professional social workers.

Finally, we want to take a moment to recognize the woman who inspired this legislation, Dr. Dorothy I. Height. Dr. Height died on April 20, 2010, just days before NASW had planned to honor her with our Lifetime Achievement Award. As the matriarch of the civil rights movement and a true social work legend, we are as committed as ever to passing this legislation in honor of the woman who never gave up.