

## **THE DOROTHY I. HEIGHT AND WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR. SOCIAL WORK REINVESTMENT ACT**

Ms. MIKULSI. Mr. President, in honor of World Social Work Day, I rise today to introduce the “Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act.” I am proud to sponsor this legislation that will improve the shortage of social workers as we move into an era of unprecedented healthcare and social service needs. Social workers play a critical role combating the social problems facing our nation. We must have the workforce in place to make sure that our returning soldiers have access to mental health services, our elderly maintain their independence in the communities they live in, and abused children are placed in safe homes. This bill reinvests in social workers by providing grants to social workers, reviewing the current social workforce challenges, and determining how this shortage will affect the communities social workers serve. I am honored to introduce this bill named after two social visionaries, Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young. Dorothy Height, a pioneer of the civil rights movement, like me began her career as a case worker and continued to fight for social justice. Whitney Young, another trailblazer of the civil rights movement, also began his career transforming our social landscape as a social worker. He helped create President Johnson’s War on Poverty and has served as President of the National Association of Social Workers. Congressman Towns introduced the companion bill in the House of Representatives last month.

As a social worker, I understand the critical role social workers place in the overall care of our populations. Social workers can be found in every facet of community life – in hospitals, mental health clinics, senior centers, and private agencies that serve individuals and families in need. Social workers are there to help struggling students, returning soldiers, and chronically ill. Often times, social workers are the only available option for mental health care in rural and underserved urban areas. The number of adults over the age of 65 will double by the year 2030 and social workers will be at the forefront of providing compassionate care to this burgeoning community. Yet there will not be enough social workers to meet these needs. Today 30,000 social workers specialize in gerontology, but we will need 70,000 of these social workers by 2010. I want to make sure that when the aging tsunami hits us, we have the workforce in place to care for our aging family members, the Alzheimer patients, the disabled.

This bill is about reinvesting in social work. It provides grants that invest in social work education, research, and training. These grants will fund community based programs of excellence and provide scholarships to train the next generation of social workers. The bill also addresses how to recruit and retain new social workers, research the impact of social services, and foster ways to improve social workplace safety. This bill establishes a national coordination center that will allow social education, advocacy and research institutions to collaborate and work together. It will facilitate gathering and distributing social work research to make the most effective use of the information we have on how social work service can improve our social fabric. This bill also gives social work the attention it deserves. It creates a media campaign that will promote social work, and recognizes March as Social Work Awareness Month.

As a social worker, I have been on the frontlines of helping people cope with issues in their everyday lives. I started off fighting for abused children, making sure they were placed in safe homes. Today I am a social worker with power. I am proud to continue to fight every day for the long range needs of the nation, on the floor of the United States Senate and as the Chairwoman of the Aging Subcommittee of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

I believe that social work is full of great opportunities, both to serve and to lead. Social work is about putting our values into action. Social workers are our best and brightest, our most committed and compassionate. They are at the frontlines of providing care, often putting themselves in dangerous and violent situations. Social workers have the ability to provide psychological, emotional, and social support – quite simply, the ability to change lives. That is why we must reinvest in social work – we must recruit, retain and research. I think we can do better by our nation’s troops, seniors, and children, by making sure we have the social workforce in place to meet their needs. I’m fighting to make sure we do.

The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is strongly supported by the National Association of Social Workers and the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. I ask unanimous consent that their letters of endorsement be printed in the Record. I also want to thank Senators Stabenow, Smith, and Inouye for their cosponsorship of this bill. I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact this important piece of legislation.