

Social Work Reinvestment Video Written Remarks

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Elizabeth Franklin: We're here today with Jim Kelly, President of the National Association of Social Workers. Welcome Dr. Kelly

Jim Kelly: Thanks! Good to be here.

Elizabeth Franklin: Would you like to tell us why the Dorothy I. Height and the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is important to the entire social work community?

Jim Kelly: It's the first time in a long time that the social work profession has been at the forefront of what's happening in Washington. It's the first time that we've been at the table getting support from the federal government as far as to support the social work profession so that we can develop and recruit additional students, and hopefully we can raise salaries and make sure that all social workers are adequately protected on job sites.

Elizabeth Franklin: We're here with Dr. Freddie Avant, President of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors. Dr. Avant, we appreciate you sitting with us today. As President of the Baccalaureate Program Directors, can you tell us why the Dorothy I. Height and the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is important to the professional social work community?

Freddie Avant: Yes. One of the things in my role as President of the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors, one of our guiding principles is to try to invest interest in our effort in the professionalization of undergraduate social work. This particular act allows us to work in a unified way, very collaboratively with others, practitioners, social work educators whose special emphasis on students preparing to be competent social worker practitioners.

Elizabeth Franklin: We're here today with Dr. Jeane Anastas, Chair of the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research. Dr. Anastas, can you tell us why the Dorothy I. Height and the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act is important to the professional social work community?

Jeane Anastas: If you read the preamble of the act it really lays out beautifully all the key sectors in society including some of our most vulnerable citizens that really need the services of professional social workers. These could be children and families, people at all stages of the life cycle, military and veterans and their families and some of the most disadvantaged in society. Social workers provide a lot of the mental health and addiction services in the country and they're key actors in our complex health system too, making sure the patients get the health care they need and deserve. This act will provide through the commission, much needed further study of the social work profession, where our shortages are in terms of diversity in the social work workforce, our problems with getting adequate pay for the highly skilled work that professional social workers do and telling us more about the future of the profession, what our needs will be and where we need to invest, including in social work research to demonstrate the effectiveness of the services that we render.

Elizabeth Franklin: Absolutely, and I'm glad you bought up research because in addition to being the Chair of the ANSWER coalition, you are also a professor at New York University and as a professor, how do you think this bill will effect students and social work education programs?

Jean Anastas: A problem that's been documented recently is the tremendous amount of education debt that many social workers carry when they get their Baccalaureate, Masters or Doctoral degrees and this is very punishing especially because they are going into a profession that is not highly compensated. If we are going to attract the best and the brightest to professional social work at all levels, we really need to do something about loan forgiveness programs and some states like my own have had some very successful pilot programs to show what a good investment this is. Public service in general is going to suffer unless we can make education affordable and accessible to a whole range of our citizens. So if we can find ways to address student indebtedness and provide better scholarship support for students who enter these occupations including social work, it will be a big step forward.

Elizabeth Franklin: As an educator, I know that you've been a social work professor for some time, can you explain why this legislation is important to social work educators?

Jim Kelly: It's the first time that educators will have a finding source in a long time that will support post docs for our faculty and we will have some funding streams to develop some centers and have grants to encourage the development of knowledge for the social work profession.

Elizabeth Franklin: And do you think this will be a good recruiting tool for social work students?

Jim Kelly: I don't think we will have a better opportunity than the publicity that will come from the enactment of this bill and the opportunities as far as for the public to learn more about what social work is and what we do every day. And with that I think it will help us to recruit an additional cadre of wonderful students who are interested in social welfare issues.

Elizabeth Franklin: As a professor, you actively have students right now in Texas, how will this bill affect students in social work education programs?

Freddie Avant: This is a tremendous opportunity for our students to begin to focus on how to prepare themselves with special training to work with an array of populations, not only in Texas but across the nation. The other thing that many of our students are faced with is the need to have financial support in order to become social workers. This particular bill will assist them in providing financial support but also allows them to begin to think about practice, education, and research and how those three things come together to become a competent social work practitioner.

Elizabeth Franklin: In closing, I'm glad you said this bill will benefit everyone, can you explain a little bit why it's important for all social workers to reinvest in their profession?

Jean Anastas: Social workers being challenged by other professions where people are moving in to do jobs that used to be done by professional social workers but they often lack the comprehensive broad and specialized education that is part of what we do in social work and always has been. So, partly we need to protect our turf and show what the special value of what a professional worker is in delivering services and some of the research and demonstration projects that the bill will fund, including model work place demonstration programs where it will show that if social workers are well compensated, are kept safe on the job and are given better working conditions the people they help will be better served. All of these things will ripple out and effect social workers practice across the nation generally, I believe. Most important may be the findings of the commission which will tell us where we have the greatest needs for new social workers, we are a graying profession, and we need to continue to recruit the best and the brightest into our field, if the people we serve are going to get the very best services that they deserve.

For more information, visit www.socialworkreinvestment.org.