

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

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I am Richard Barth, Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland and President of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. I, too, thank Congressman Towns for gathering us here today to talk about the critical issues facing the profession of social work. He had the foresight to introduce this legislation in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress prior to the economic collapse. The profession was already facing the challenges my colleagues have outlined today, and Congressman Towns (along with Senator Mikulski) have endeavored to prevent the profession from losing the ability to fully serve the clients who need us the most. The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress brought with it economic and social instability, and a renewed sense of the importance of the social work profession and this legislation. I'd like to discuss what this bill would do if passed into law and just some of the positive effects it would be likely to have on the profession and the country.

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 populations that social workers serve, and better understand the overwhelming need for reinvestment into the profession of social work. We do not currently have all of the answers, but we do know that we must take action to combat societal issues in our service as first responders for acute and dangerous conditions such as child maltreatment, elder abuse, domestic violence, financial malfeasance, juvenile violence, and mental illness that is a threat to self and others.

Social workers also have a leading role in addressing poverty, addiction, mental illness, and rising school drop-out rates. The demand for social work's expertise in health care delivery will grow greater under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

We do know through both research and anecdote that, while social workers can save money, prevent negative consequences, and improve lives, there are just not enough professional social workers to provide the services needed. We recognize that we must recruit new social workers and retain current social workers but until we overcome threats to the ability to accomplish this, our health care, mental health care, child welfare, and substance abuse treatment programs—to name only a few--will lack the leadership and professional staff that they need.

If passed into law, the Social Work Reinvestment Act would create a Reinvestment Commission to provide independent advice and counsel to Congress on policy issues associated with recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession. Areas of analysis include some of the major areas in which social workers provide key services such as aging, child welfare, military and veterans affairs, mental and behavioral health and disability, criminal justice and correctional systems, health, and issues affecting the safety of women and children. Additional areas of study include high social work educational debt, social work workforce trends, diversity, social work research, social worker safety, and state level licensing reciprocity.

The Commission will provide guidance to Congress and the Executive Branch in determining future policy initiatives necessary to ensure a vital social work community and to protect those Americans who rely most upon the assistance of our nation's social workers.

The social work profession has experienced limited attention, support, and funding opportunities because of the lack of an official federal study which confirms the issues we are discussing today. This component of the bill is critical to help the profession survive and thrive. This is, in turn, critical to improving the cost-effectiveness of mental health, substance abuse, violence prevention, health, and school based services, to name a few.

The Social Work Reinvestment Act would lay the groundwork for future advances in the profession and also help our nation tackle current challenges. It would fund demonstration grants to address issues in the areas of workplace improvements, research, education and training, and the dissemination of evidence-based practices to community-based programs.

We are particularly proud that Dr. Height provided input and guidance on this bill. She was adamant that women and people of color were included in the legislation that bears her name. She worked with Congressman Towns, the Congressional Black Caucus and the White House in an effort to pass the bill into law.

The social work community, and the nation, were diminished by Dr. Height's death earlier this year. While we have long been determined to pass the bill into law, the significance of this effort is furthered by this opportunity to honor Dr. Height.

There have been many barriers to passing the legislation, but we are fortunate to have Congressman Towns as an advocate for this bill. The Congressman has worked tirelessly to pass this legislation into law and make Dr. Height's vision a reality. He has supported swift movement of the legislation through committee and onto the suspension calendar and attempted to gain legislative and administrative support for the Reinvestment Commission. These efforts include asking President Obama and Secretary Sebelius to establish the Reinvestment Commission.

We look forward to continuing to work with him in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, which we view as an opportunity to educate the new members of the importance of our profession and its capacity to reduce the costs to society of a range of health, mental health, and social ills.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you, today.