



**Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act  
H.R. 795  
Talking Points**

**Message #1:** 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.

**Message #2:** 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.

**Message #3:** The Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act (H.R. 795) 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**

**Message #1:**

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***

- More than one million veterans will return from the Iraq War, 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.
- There are currently 30,000 licensed social workers practicing in gerontology, far short of the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 needed by 2010.

- Social workers provide services to the one in seven 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 1.4 million new cases of cancer reported annually, 1.3 million people receiving hospice care, and 1.3 million Americans living with HIV or AIDS.
- The national high school drop-out rate is nearing 10% 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.

**Message #2:** 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 – including competing policy priorities, fiscal constraints, significant educational debt, comparatively insufficient salaries, increased administrative burdens, and unsupportive work environments – that compromise their ability to provide essential services and necessary care.
- 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.

- 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.
- In the past two years social workers have experienced increases in barriers to effective practice and decreases in support systems for effective practice, including:
  - Increases in paperwork, severity of client problems, size of caseload, waiting lists for services, assignment of non-social work tasks and level of oversight.
  - Decreases in job security, social work staffing levels, other staffing levels, availability of supervision and reimbursement levels.
- Approximately 19% of social workers reported that vacancies were common in their agencies and 53% reported that vacancies were either “difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to fill.
- Almost 45% of social workers reported that they faced personal safety issues on the job. Social workers in criminal justice were most likely to report personal safety issues (67%), followed by those in child welfare/family and addictions (both 52%).
- 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. Some will either retire or stop working, while others plan to leave social work, but continue working.
- The social work job outlook from the Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that employment for social workers is expected to grow much faster than average for all occupations through 2016. Employment of social workers is expected to increase 22% during the 2006-2016 decade, which is much faster than average for all occupations. There is an increasing need to recruit more social workers to the profession to fill this important need.
- 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.

**Message #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 (D-NY) on February 4, 2009. Rep. Towns is a member of the United States House of Representatives and is a professional social worker.
- 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 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.
- SWRA will also create a Reinvestment Commission to provide independent advice and counsel to Congress on policy issues associated with the recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession of social work. Areas of analysis include aging, child welfare, military and veterans affairs, mental and behavioral health and disability, criminal justice and correctional systems, health, and issues affecting women and children as well as fair market compensation, high social work educational debt, social work workforce trends, social work research, diversity in the profession, social work safety, and state level social work 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.
- Important Changes to the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress version of the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act:
  - Enhanced Social Work Reinvestment Commission which now includes 1 labor economist, 1 social work consumer, 1 clinical social worker, and 4 additional members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, minority leader of the House of Representatives, majority leader of the Senate, and minority leader of the Senate. Additionally, the

commission will expand its study to included issues relevant to women and children. The purposes, duties, and powers of the commission have also been expanded to ensure the best possible recommendations to Congress.

- Demonstration Programs have been updated to be more inclusive of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Specifically, 10 of the 25 research grants will be awarded to individuals employed by these institutions and 4 of the 20 education and training grants will be awarded to HBCUs and MSIs.
- The legislation has broadened its diversity component to require the demonstration of cultural competency and promotion of participation from diverse groups in the Social Work Reinvestment Commission, National Coordinating Center and all Demonstration Programs.