Background

- Nearly one million children are victims of child abuse or neglect each year.
- In one year alone, 513,000 children were placed in foster care.
- Each year, an estimated 20,000 young people "age out" of the U.S. foster care system.
- Currently, 90% of states report difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified staff to work in their child welfare agencies.
- Child welfare agency staff turnover is associated with multiple foster care placements.
- Staff vacancy rates in child welfare agencies are higher than other child-serving programs.
- High caseloads and staff turnover hurt children and families.

Social Workers Are Needed in Child Welfare

Although evidence demonstrates that social workers improve outcomes for children, nationally, fewer than 40% of child welfare workers are professional social workers.

Research shows that social workers in child welfare agencies were more likely to find permanent homes for children who were in foster care for two years or more, and were better prepared to help children and families achieve child welfare outcomes.

Social workers cite increased administrative burdens and reduced supports within agencies that serve children and families as factors that hinder staff retention. Social workers in child welfare also report lower salaries and higher levels of unaddressed safety issues compared to social workers in other areas.

Action Needed

Support the introduction and passage of legislation in the Senate and House to establish loan forgiveness programs for social workers and to expand the Title IV-B Child Welfare Training Program.
Loan Forgiveness Will Improve Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers in Child Welfare

- Financing higher education is increasingly difficult, especially for graduates who seek positions in child welfare where salaries can be lower than in other settings.
- Developing state and federal loan forgiveness programs will provide incentives for social workers to work with children in public or private non-profit child welfare agencies.
- Expanding national loan forgiveness programs for professional social workers who stay employed in child welfare will help retain members of this workforce.

Improve the Title IV-E Training Program for Social Workers Working with Abused and Neglected Children

The major federal child welfare training program, Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, offers training for current staff and those preparing for employment. The Title IV-E training provisions need to be maintained and enhanced to include social work education and training through both public and private universities.

Social workers who participated in a IV-E educational partnership program are more likely to stay in child welfare than other workers hired at the same time, and are more likely to demonstrate self-efficacy and commitment to child welfare.

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