



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



National Association of Social Workers



May 26, 2020

Dear Senator Durbin and Representative Schakowsky:

On behalf of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work (NADD), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), thank you for your continued work to address the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our organizations would also like to express our appreciation for your introduction of the *Health Heroes 2020 Act*. This legislation will provide critical support for the health workforce during this time of extreme need. Additionally, the legislation’s emphasis on addressing the pandemic’s exacerbation of racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes is especially noteworthy. As your legislation notes, expanding the representation of minority populations working in health careers is vital not only to address disparate impacts of COVID-19, but inequities in health outcomes as a whole. We also write to respectfully request your consideration of changes to the *Health Heroes 2020 Act* in recognition and furtherance of social workers’ key role in meeting the Nation’s mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

While the *Health Heroes 2020 Act* explicitly lists several graduate degree programs amongst those eligible for the bill’s proposed creation of a National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Reserve Service, social work is not explicitly named. Social workers have been, and continue to be, a critical component of the COVID-19 response, having been designated as “essential workers” by both federal and state entities. Social workers are providing critical services in hospitals, child protective services, nursing homes, and other community-based settings that must continue throughout this pandemic. These efforts include the delivery of preventative and treatment services to promote health and well-being, ensuring individuals and communities have access to needed services, providing remote counseling, and organizing ways to overcome isolation, among other efforts. Given the tremendous contribution social workers are making during this public health crisis, our organizations ask that social work be explicitly listed amongst the graduate degrees outlined in the bill.

Additionally, we want to take this opportunity to highlight existing barriers which limit social worker participation in NHSC scholarship and loan repayment programs. While we do not believe the program’s structural barriers were originally intended, unfortunately, the current design of the NHSC creates obstacles for qualified social workers to gain access to the program. As the country’s largest providers of mental health services, we would appreciate the opportunity to work with you to ensure social workers are able to fully participate in NHSC programs and serve those most in need.

Again, on behalf of our organizations, we express our sincere appreciation and gratitude for the work you are doing and your efforts to support individuals, families, and communities during this trying time. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can be a resource.

Sincerely,

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