

ISSUE BRIEF

Cosponsor and Support Passage of the Social Work Reinvestment Act (H.R. 1532)

BACKGROUND

There are more than 650,000 professional social workers across the country providing essential services to more than 10 million individuals in the United States. Social Workers have long been the workforce to guide people to critical resources, counsel them on important life decisions, and help them reach their full potential. The aging of our population, the growing needs of our veterans and their families, more people living longer with chronic diseases, increased recognition that mental health needs must be addressed in children, adolescents, and adults, including older adults, and the recognition that social determinants of health affect health outcomes—all create increased demand for social workers. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects employment of social workers to grow at an above-average rate through 2026, with a 16% growth rate overall.¹ Healthcare occupations are projected to grow 19% from 2014-2024.²

The social work profession faces substantial challenges in meeting this increased demand for services. Serious safety concerns, high caseloads, difficult working conditions, significant educational debt, and comparatively insufficient salaries all pose as barriers to recruitment and retention of social workers. Replacing retiring social workers presents another challenge for the profession. In light of these challenges, NASW projects an imminent shortage of professionals to meet the increased demand for social work services.

To address these workforce challenges, NASW launched the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative. The Initiative's goal is to enhance societal well-being by securing federal and state investments to support recruitment, retention, recognition, and adequate reimbursement of professional social workers.

One key focus of the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative is the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr., Social Work Reinvestment Act* (H.R. 1532), introduced in the 116th Congress by Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA-13). By addressing the profession's workforce challenges, H.R. 1532 creates the foundation to ensure that millions of individuals and families throughout the

nation can continue to receive high-quality social work services. A key provision of the legislation establishes a Social Work Reinvestment Commission to provide a comprehensive analysis of issues facing the social work profession, including workforce trends, high educational debt, low salaries, cultural diversity, and the connection between research and practice.

Additionally, the bill funds demonstration programs to address relevant, "on the ground" realities experienced by our nation's professional 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.

POLICY SOLUTION

Cosponsor and support the passage and funding of the *Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr., Social Work Reinvestment Act* (H.R. 1532), particularly the establishment of a commission to assess and make recommendations related to the issues facing the social work profession.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019). Social workers: Summary. *Occupational outlook handbook*. Retrieved from www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Healthcare Occupations. *Occupational outlook handbook*. Retrieved from www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm

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