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S.C. Social Work Reinvestment Initiative

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Introduction

On February 14, 2008, Representative Edolphus Townes introduced House Resolution 5447 to the 110th Congress. On April 15, 2008, U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski introduced Senate bill 2858 to the 110th Congress. These companion bills are also known as the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act (SWRI). This act can be considered the most comprehensive campaign focused directly and specifically on *Social Work*. It is a measure set out to invest in the profession at a time when it is needed most.

Although the overall goal is to maximize the services provided to clients, a strengthening of the entire field is imperative to ensure maximum service is delivered. The national initiative has identified the following areas that need enhancement: Recruiting new Social Workers, retaining current Social Workers, retraining experienced Social Workers, and reactivating community interest and value in Social Work. The success of this initiative requires collaboration among workforce development, stakeholder engagement, public education, the legislative and political arenas, and the advocacy of Social Workers for the Social Work field.

Proposal

As we continue into this period of unparalleled healthcare and social service needs, it is recognized that there is no profession as equipped and capable as Social Workers to combat the current social problems we face as a nation and state. NASW has engaged in the Reinvestment Initiative by enlisting each of the current 52 state chapters in creating a unique initiative plan germane to the challenges face in each state. As of yet, South Carolina is one of six states

without such an initiative. This plan is presented as a proposal for the NASW-SC chapter to adopt and submit to our national organization.

The Initiative

The South Carolina Social Work Reinvestment Initiative (SCSWRI) will be comprised of five goals. Each goal is supported by specific strategies developed by research pertaining to S.C.

Goal 1: Reintroduce Social Work as a profession.

All of our state universities and colleges who offer Social Work curriculum should employ an effort to promote and publicize the work of Social Workers, the individuals and families impacted by our services, what impact our services have on clients, and how this benefits our state as a whole. This can be accomplished by visiting high schools on career days, setting up information booths at local events, writing letters to the editor in local papers, setting up community workshops, and promoting NASW-SC events and initiatives.

There should be an effort to establish a political institute within our state Social Work programs. Social Workers should be savvy in the political process at the state and national level to understand how public policy affects the Social Work profession, our clients, and the community. There should be a push to involve Social Workers in political campaigns and legislation to gain recognition in the political realm. There should also be a move forward to engage Social Workers in running for political offices to further promote Social Work values. It should be no secret that our holistic approach, guided by a client centered vow to service makes Social Workers an ideal candidate to serve as a public official.

An effort should be embarked upon to employ at least one career lobbyist who represents and advocates for the issues adopted by the SC chapter of NASW. This position should be filled by one who has completed a Master's level of Social Work training. The NASW-SC lobbyist should develop close relationships with state and local politicians and work to engage them in the initiatives set by NASW-SC by offering compelling evidence as to why such proposals should be considered, changed, or introduced.

Goal 2: Enforce State law regarding Social Workers

It is evident that the Social Work has suffered a tremendous blow to the esteem of the field due to the practice of unqualified, non-licensed, and self-proclaimed Social Workers. S.C. law under **Title 40** (Professions and Occupations) **chapter 63** (Social Workers) **section 30** clearly states that: *No individual shall offer Social Work services or use the designation "Social Worker", "Licensed Baccalaureate Social Worker", "Licensed Masters Social Worker", "Licensed Independent Social Worker--Clinical Practice", "Licensed Independent Social Worker--Advanced Practice", or the initials "LBSW", "LMSW", or "LISW" or any other designation indicating licensure status or hold themselves out as practicing Social Work or as a Baccalaureate Social Worker, Masters Social Worker, or Independent Social Worker unless licensed in accordance with this chapter.*

It is further stated that: *any person providing Social Work services to a client in the State, through telephonic, electronic, or other means, regardless of the location of the Social Worker, who is not licensed in this State, is practicing without a license.*

It is our duty to uphold this accreditation by holding accountable those in violation of State law.

Goal 3: Create loan forgiveness programs for BSW and MSW students.

The loan forgiveness program should be implemented as a way to retain talented Social Workers who gain qualifications in South Carolina. The incentive should require a commitment to serve a community or within an agency in South Carolina for a specified amount of time.

There should be additional loan forgiveness incentives extended to those Social Workers who commit to serve in a field where there is a shortage of qualified personnel and in an underserved population. This can be applied to children's services such as foster care, child welfare, early childhood mental health, and residential care. This may also apply to aging services including but not limited to assisted living, home health, end of life care, or any other areas in which a shortage of qualified professionals occurs.

Goal 4: Set salaries for Social Workers commensurate to one's education, skills, experience, and licensure.

This measure will be difficult to obtain, but will only take place by meeting all other goals. There should be an endeavor to standardize position qualifications and requirements for health and human service agencies (public and private) to hire qualified, professional, licensed Social Workers.

A compilation of statewide salary information should be disseminated, analyzed, and compared to similar positions in surrounding states.

Goal 5: Prepare South Carolina for the increased demand of Social Workers in the future.

With the increasing number of "baby boomers" approaching the age of 65, there is the inevitability of the need for Social Workers in the aging field. There should be an increase in

funding and incentive for the areas of Social Work where this need is based. This can be accomplished by encouraging state fellowships at college Social Work programs.

Conclusion

By taking the initiative to reinvest in Social Work, a promotion of the field will create an attraction to the profession. South Carolina continues to suffer from numerous social issues that require qualified professionals to foster change. Social Workers should embrace the opportunity we have been presented through the national initiative, recent political changes, and an increase in the immense need of Social Work services and skills.

The recent election of Representative Anton Gunn provides us an additional ally in the statehouse who understands the challenges Social Workers face. Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter continues to serve as an advocate for issues relevant to Social Work, and the recent interest in politics displayed by students in the USC MSW program show the need for this initiative to be launched.

Justification

- According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 5,310 people self-identified as Social Workers in South Carolina; South Carolina ranked 35th among states in Social Workers per capita.
- In 2006, 4,196,848 people lived in South Carolina.
- 14.2% of the population lives at or below the federal poverty level, compared to 12.6% nationally.
- 12.4% of the population is over the age of 65. The aging population is expected to grow 69% between the years 2000-2020.
- 412,000 veterans live in South Carolina, which ranks at 24th in the nation.

- In 2006, 531,185 people were enrolled in Medicaid.
- In 1999, South Carolina was above the national death rates due to cancer, heart disease, and firearms.
- In 2000, South Carolina was below national average of hospital beds per 100,000 population.
- As of December 2008, South Carolina's unemployment rate was 8.4%, ranking our state the third highest in the United States. South Carolina is projected to reach a staggering 14 percent unemployment rate in 2009.
- SOWK programs include The University of South Carolina, Winthrop University, Benedict College, Coker College, Columbia College, Limestone College, and SC State University.