

110TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2858

To establish the Social Work Reinvestment Commission to provide independent counsel to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on policy issues associated with recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession of social work, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 15, 2008

Ms. MIKULSKI (for herself, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. SMITH, and Mr. INOUE) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To establish the Social Work Reinvestment Commission to provide independent counsel to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on policy issues associated with recruitment, retention, research, and reinvestment in the profession of social work, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Dorothy I. Height and
5 Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that
4 social worker employment is expected to increase.
5 The increase is expected to be greater than the aver-
6 age increase in employment (estimated to be 18 to
7 26 percent) for all occupations through 2014, dem-
8 onstrating a substantial need for social workers. The
9 need is even greater for social workers in the area
10 of aging. The National Association of Social Work-
11 ers Center for Workforce Studies estimates that 9
12 percent of, or 30,000, licensed social workers spe-
13 cialize in gerontology. By 2010, as more Baby
14 Boomers reach the age of 65, the National Institute
15 on Aging projects that 60,000 to 70,000 social
16 workers will be needed.

17 (2) Social work salaries are among the lowest
18 for professionals in general and for those with mas-
19 ter's level educations in particular. A survey con-
20 ducted by the John A. Hartford Foundation found
21 that between 1992 and 1999 the annual rate of
22 wage growth for degree-holding social workers was
23 0.8 percent. According to the National Association
24 of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies, 60
25 percent of full-time social workers earn between
26 \$35,000 and \$59,999 per year with 25 percent earn-

1 ing between \$40,000 and \$49,999 per year. Social
2 workers who earn lower salaries are more likely to
3 work in challenging agency environments and to
4 serve more vulnerable clients. They are also more
5 likely to leave the profession.

6 (3) According to one study by the Council on
7 Social Work Education, 68 percent of individuals
8 surveyed who held a master's degree in social work
9 graduated with an average debt of \$26,777. Addi-
10 tionally, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group
11 states that 37 percent of public 4-year graduates
12 have too much debt to manage as a starting social
13 worker. While social workers may be in positions
14 that are personally fulfilling, due to their high loan
15 debt and low income, many struggle financially.

16 (4) Social work is unquestionably a dangerous
17 profession for many. According to the American
18 Federation of State, County and Municipal Employ-
19 ees, 70 percent of caseworkers report that front line
20 staff in their agency have been victims of violence or
21 received threats of violence. Social workers are con-
22 siderably safer when measures such as use of global
23 positioning systems, self-defense training, and con-
24 flict prevention are implemented.

1 (5) According to a study by the University of
2 Michigan, approximately 1 in 7 adults over the age
3 of 70 have some form of dementia and 9.7 percent
4 (or 2,400,000) of those found with dementia were
5 also found to have Alzheimer's disease. Social work-
6 ers in gerontology settings work with older adults,
7 including those with dementia, to support their phys-
8 iological, psychological, and social needs through
9 mental health therapy, caregiver and family coun-
10 seling, health education, program coordination, and
11 case management. Those professionals also assist
12 the hundreds of thousands of older persons who are
13 abused, neglected, frail, or vulnerable. Between 2000
14 and 2004, there was a 19.7 percent increase in the
15 total number of reports of elder and vulnerable adult
16 abuse and neglect.

17 (6) The Children's Defense Fund states that
18 every 35 seconds a child is confirmed as abused or
19 neglected. The Administration for Children and
20 Families of the Department of Health and Human
21 Services states that 513,000 children were in the
22 United States foster care system in 2005. Most chil-
23 dren placed in foster care are placed due to parental
24 abuse or neglect. Research shows that professional
25 social workers in child welfare agencies are more

1 likely to find permanent homes for children who
2 were in foster care for 2 or more years. Unfortu-
3 nately, fewer than 40 percent of child welfare work-
4 ers are professional social workers.

5 (7) The Department of Health and Human
6 Services estimates that 26.2 percent of (or 1 in 4)
7 individuals in the United States age 18 or older ex-
8 periences a diagnosable mental health disorder. Ad-
9 ditionally, 1 in 5 children and adolescents experi-
10 ences a mental health disorder. At least 1 in 10, or
11 about 6,000,000, young people have a serious emo-
12 tional disturbance. Social workers provide the major-
13 ity of mental health counseling services in the
14 United States, and are often the only providers of
15 such services in rural areas.

16 (8) The Department of Veterans Affairs esti-
17 mates that there are 23,977,000 veterans in the
18 United States. Approximately 1,100,000 active duty
19 soldiers have been deployed to Iraq since 2001. A
20 once declining veteran population is now surging and
21 is in dire need of mental health treatment to address
22 issues such as post traumatic stress disorder, de-
23 pression, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicidal
24 tendencies. Veterans make up 25 percent of home-
25 less people, even though veterans comprise only 11

1 percent of the general population, in the United
2 States. Social workers working with veterans and
3 their families provide case management, crisis inter-
4 ventions, mental health interventions, housing and
5 financial counseling, high risk screening, and advoca-
6 cacy among other services. The Department employs
7 over 5,000 professional social workers and is the sin-
8 gle largest employer of social workers in the Nation.
9 The Department's social workers also coordinate the
10 Community Residential Care Program, the oldest
11 and most cost-effective of the Department's ex-
12 tended care programs.

13 (9) The American Cancer Society estimates
14 that there were 1,399,790 new cases of cancer and
15 564,830 cancer deaths in 2006 alone. The incidence
16 of cancer will increase dramatically as the population
17 grows older. The Centers for Disease Control and
18 Prevention report that at the end of 2003 there were
19 1,039,000 to 1,285,000 people living with HIV or
20 AIDS in the United States. In 2006, 1,300,000 peo-
21 ple received care from the Nation's hospice pro-
22 viders. Health care and medical social workers prac-
23 tice in areas related to all of these circumstances
24 and provide outreach for prevention of health issues,
25 help individuals and their families adapt to their cir-

1 cumstances, provide grief counseling, and act as a li-
2 aison between individuals and their medical team,
3 helping patients make informed decisions about their
4 care.

5 (10) The National Center for Education Statis-
6 tics states that in 2005 the national dropout rate for
7 high school students was 9.4 percent. White stu-
8 dents dropped out at a rate of 6 percent. African-
9 American students dropped out at a rate of 10.4
10 percent. Hispanic students dropped out at a rate of
11 22.4 percent. Some vulnerable communities have
12 dropout rates of 50 percent or higher. Social work-
13 ers in school settings help students avoid dropping
14 out through early identification, prevention, inter-
15 vention, counseling, and support services.

16 (11) According to the Department of Justice,
17 every year more than 650,000 ex-offenders are re-
18 leased from Federal and State prisons. Social work-
19 ers employed in the corrections system address dis-
20 proportionate minority incarceration rates, provide
21 treatment for mental health problems and drug and
22 alcohol addiction, and work within as well as outside
23 of the prison to reduce recidivism and increase posi-
24 tive community reentry.

1 **SEC. 3. SOCIAL WORK REINVESTMENT COMMISSION.**

2 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 3 months after
 3 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
 4 tablish the Social Work Reinvestment Commission (re-
 5 ferred to in this Act as the “Commission”) to provide
 6 independent counsel to Congress and the Secretary on pol-
 7 icy issues associated with recruitment, retention, research,
 8 and reinvestment in the profession of social work.

9 (b) APPOINTMENT.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall be ap-
 11 pointed by the Secretary, and shall be composed of
 12 educated social workers and other members, as fol-
 13 lows:

14 (A) 2 deans of schools of social work.

15 (B) 1 social work researcher.

16 (C) 1 related professional researcher.

17 (D) 1 Governor.

18 (E) 2 leaders of national social work orga-
 19 nizations.

20 (F) 1 senior social work State official.

21 (G) 1 senior related State official.

22 (H) 2 directors of community-based orga-
 23 nizations or nonprofit organizations.

24 (2) CHAIRPERSON; VICE CHAIRPERSON.—The
 25 Secretary shall select a chairperson and vice chair-

1 person for the Commission from among the mem-
 2 bers of the Commission.

3 (3) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT; VACANCIES.—

4 Members shall be appointed for the life of the Coun-
 5 cil. Any vacancy in the Council shall not affect the
 6 powers of the Council, but shall be filled in the same
 7 manner as the original appointment.

8 (c) MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION.—The Commis-
 9 sion shall hold its first meeting not later than 6 weeks
 10 after the date on which the final member of the Commis-
 11 sion is appointed, and subsequent meetings at the call of
 12 the chairperson.

13 (d) CONSULTATION.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall con-
 15 sult, to the extent that the Commission determines
 16 that such consultation is necessary or useful to carry
 17 out subsection (e), with—

18 (A) entities within the Department of
 19 Health and Human Services, including the Ad-
 20 ministration for Children and Families, the Ad-
 21 ministration on Aging, the Agency for
 22 Healthcare Research and Quality, the Centers
 23 for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers
 24 for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Health
 25 Resources and Services Administration, the In-

1 dian Health Service, the National Institutes of
2 Health, and the Substance Abuse and Mental
3 Health Services Administration;

4 (B) the Social Security Administration;

5 (C) the Departments of Agriculture, De-
6 fense, Education, Homeland Security, Labor,
7 Justice, State, and Veterans Affairs; and

8 (D) any other agency of the Federal Gov-
9 ernment, as determined by the Commission.

10 (2) COOPERATION AND COUNSEL.—The entities
11 and agencies described in paragraph (1) shall co-
12 operate with and provide counsel to the Commission
13 to the greatest extent practicable.

14 (e) STUDY.—The Commission shall study—

15 (1) social work practice in the areas of aging,
16 child welfare, military and veteran's issues, mental
17 and behavioral health and disability, criminal justice,
18 and health;

19 (2) issues facing the social work profession, in-
20 cluding fair market compensation, high social work
21 educational debt, social work workforce trends,
22 knowledge development, and social work safety, as
23 well as any other area determined by the Secretary
24 to be appropriate; and

1 (3) State-level social work licensure policies and
2 reciprocity agreements for providing services across
3 State lines.

4 (f) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than 18
5 months after the date of the Commission’s first meeting,
6 the Commission shall submit a report to Congress and the
7 Secretary on the results of the study, to determine and
8 address the immediate and future needs of the social work
9 profession.

10 (g) PERSONNEL.—

11 (1) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—The members of the
12 Commission shall not receive compensation for the
13 performance of services for the Commission, but
14 shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem
15 in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for em-
16 ployees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57
17 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their
18 homes or regular places of business in the perform-
19 ance of services for the Commission. Notwith-
20 standing section 1342 of title 31, United States
21 Code, the Secretary may accept the voluntary and
22 uncompensated services of members of the Commis-
23 sion.

24 (2) DETAIL OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.—
25 Any Federal Government employee may be detailed

1 to the Commission without reimbursement, and such
2 detail shall be without interruption or loss of civil
3 service status or privilege.

4 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
5 authorized to be appropriated \$500,000 for use by the
6 Commission.

7 **SEC. 4. REINVESTMENT GRANT PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS**
8 **THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROFESSION**
9 **OF SOCIAL WORK.**

10 (a) AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT DEMONSTRATION PRO-
11 GRAMS.—The Secretary is authorized to award grants to
12 eligible entities and individuals under subsections (b)
13 through (e) for each fiscal year to support demonstration
14 programs related to research, workplace improvements,
15 education, training, and programs of excellence.

16 (b) WORKPLACE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary is authorized
18 to award grants to 4 eligible entities (2 public agen-
19 cies and 2 private agencies) to address workplace
20 concerns for the social work profession, including
21 caseloads, compensation, social work safety, super-
22 vision, and working conditions.

23 (2) EQUAL AMOUNTS.—The Secretary shall
24 award grants under this subsection in equal amounts
25 of not less than \$250,000 and not more than

1 \$1,000,000 to the 4 eligible entities. The Secretary
2 shall award the grants annually over a 4-year period.

3 (3) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
4 subsection, the Secretary shall give priority to eligi-
5 ble entities that—

6 (A) are equipped with the capacity to over-
7 see and monitor the demonstration program
8 carried out under this subsection, including
9 proven financial responsibility and administra-
10 tive capability; and

11 (B) are knowledgeable about relevant
12 workforce trends and have at least 2 years of
13 experience relevant to the demonstration pro-
14 gram.

15 (c) RESEARCH GRANTS.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary is authorized
17 to award grants to not less than 25 social workers
18 holding a doctoral degree in social work, for post-
19 doctoral research in social work to further the
20 knowledge base about effective social work interven-
21 tions and to promote usable strategies to translate
22 research into practice across diverse community set-
23 tings and service systems.

24 (2) AMOUNTS.—The Secretary shall award
25 grants under this subsection in a total amount of

1 \$5,000,000. The Secretary shall award the grants
2 over a 4-year period.

3 (d) EDUCATION AND TRAINING GRANTS.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary is authorized
5 to award 20 grants to eligible entities to support re-
6 cruitment of social work students for, and education
7 of the students in, baccalaureate, master's, and doc-
8 toral degree programs, as well as the development of
9 faculty.

10 (2) EQUAL AMOUNTS.—The Secretary shall
11 award grants under this subsection in equal amounts
12 of not less than \$75,000 and not more than
13 \$100,000 to the 20 eligible entities. The Secretary
14 shall award the grants annually over a 4-year period.

15 (3) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
16 subsection, the Secretary shall give priority to eligi-
17 ble entities that—

18 (A) are accredited by the Council on Social
19 Work Education;

20 (B) have a graduation rate of not less than
21 80 percent; and

22 (C) exhibit an ability to recruit social work
23 students from or place the students in high
24 need and high demand areas.

1 (e) COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS OF EXCELLENCE
2 GRANTS.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary is authorized
4 to award grants to 6 eligible entities that are car-
5 rying out programs of excellence to further test and
6 replicate effective social work interventions. The Sec-
7 retary shall choose eligible entities carrying out pro-
8 grams in the areas of aging, child welfare, military
9 and veteran’s issues, mental and behavioral health
10 and disability, criminal justice, and health.

11 (2) EQUAL AMOUNTS.—The Secretary shall
12 award grants under this subsection in equal amounts
13 of not less than \$250,000 and not more than
14 \$500,000 to the 6 eligible entities. The Secretary
15 shall award the grants annually over a 3-year period.

16 (3) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants under this
17 subsection, the Secretary shall give priority to eligi-
18 ble entities that—

19 (A) have demonstrated successful and
20 measurable outcomes that are worthy of replica-
21 tion;

22 (B) have been in operation for at least 2
23 years; and

24 (C) work with high need and high demand
25 populations.

1 (f) GRANT AWARD REQUIREMENTS.—In awarding
2 grants under subsections (b) through (e), the Secretary
3 shall, to the extent practicable, award grants—

4 (1) in the case of grants under subsection (b),
5 (d), or (e), to eligible entities that—

6 (A) demonstrate knowledge, under-
7 standing, and participation in the entities' pro-
8 grams, of individuals and groups from different
9 racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, geographic, reli-
10 gious, sexual orientation, linguistic, and class
11 backgrounds;

12 (B) demonstrate a record of active partici-
13 pation of professionally trained social workers
14 in the entities' programs; and

15 (C) provide services and represent the indi-
16 viduals employed by the entities as competent
17 only within the boundaries of their education,
18 training, licenses, certification, consultation re-
19 ceived, supervised experience, or other relevant
20 professional experience; and

21 (2) in the case of grants under subsection (c),
22 to individuals that—

23 (A) demonstrate knowledge and under-
24 standing of individuals and groups described in
25 paragraph (1)(A); and

1 (B) provide services and represent them-
2 selves as competent only within the boundaries
3 described in paragraph (1)(C).

4 (g) NATIONAL COORDINATING CENTER.—

5 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall
6 enter into a contract with a national social work re-
7 search entity that—

8 (A) has experience in coordinating the
9 transfer of information and ideas among enti-
10 ties engaged in social work research, practice,
11 education, and policymaking; and

12 (B) maintains relationships with Federal
13 entities, social work degree-granting institutions
14 of higher education and departments of social
15 work within such institutions, and organizations
16 and agencies that employ social workers.

17 (2) GENERAL DUTIES.—The entity shall serve
18 as a coordinating center and shall organize informa-
19 tion and other data, collect and report data, serve as
20 a clearinghouse, and coordinate activities with the
21 entities, institutions, departments, organizations,
22 and agencies described in paragraph (1). The coordi-
23 nating center shall work with institutions of higher
24 education, research entities, and entities with social
25 work practice settings to identify key research areas

1 to be pursued, select research fellows, and organize
2 appropriate mentorship and professional develop-
3 ment efforts.

4 (3) SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES DESCRIBED.—The co-
5 ordinating center shall—

6 (A) collect, coordinate, monitor, and dis-
7 tribute data, information on best practices, and
8 findings regarding the activities funded under
9 grants made to eligible entities and individuals
10 under the demonstration programs described in
11 subsections (b) through (e); and

12 (B) prepare and submit to the Secretary a
13 report that includes recommendations regarding
14 the need to recruit new social workers, retain
15 current social workers, conduct social work re-
16 search, and reinvest into the profession of social
17 work.

18 (4) SELECTION.—The Secretary or a designee,
19 in collaboration with the coordinating center, shall
20 select topics to be researched under this subsection,
21 shall select candidates and finalists for research fel-
22 low positions, and shall determine other activities to
23 be carried out under this subsection.

24 (5) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
25 There is authorized to be appropriated \$1,000,000

1 to carry out this subsection for each of fiscal years
 2 2009 through 2013.

3 (h) MULTI-MEDIA OUTREACH CAMPAIGN.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall develop
 5 and issue public service announcements that adver-
 6 tise and promote the social work profession, high-
 7 light the advantages and rewards of social work, and
 8 encourage individuals to enter the social work pro-
 9 fession.

10 (2) METHOD.—The public service announce-
 11 ments described in paragraph (1) shall be broadcast
 12 through appropriate media outlets, including tele-
 13 vision or radio, in a manner intended to reach as
 14 wide and diverse an audience as possible.

15 (3) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
 16 There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
 17 this subsection such sums as may be necessary for
 18 each of fiscal year 2009 through 2012.

19 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK AWARENESS MONTH.**

20 (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to des-
 21 ignate a National Social Work Awareness Month to—

22 (1) raise awareness about the importance of the
 23 profession of social work; and

24 (2) encourage interest groups, stakeholders, and
 25 individuals to take an active role in recruitment, re-

1 tention, research, and reinvestment in the profession
2 of social work.

3 (b) DESIGNATION.—The Senate—

4 (1) designates March of 2008, and of each suc-
5 ceeding year, as “National Social Work Awareness
6 Month”; and

7 (2) encourages the people of the United States
8 to observe the month with appropriate ceremonies
9 and activities.

10 **SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.**

11 In this Act:

12 (1) COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM.—The term
13 “community-based program” means an agency, or-
14 ganization, or other entity, carrying out a program
15 that provides direct social work services, or commu-
16 nity development services, at a neighborhood, local-
17 ity, or regional level, to address human service,
18 health care, or psychosocial needs.

19 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
20 ty” means—

21 (A) in reference to section 4(b), a public or
22 private agency working in a social work capac-
23 ity that demonstrates a need in a workplace
24 concern area described in section 4(b)(1);

1 (B) in reference to section 4(d), a depart-
 2 ment of social work within an institution of
 3 higher education, or the institution of higher
 4 education, that offers a baccalaureate, master's,
 5 or doctoral degree in social work; and

6 (C) in reference to section 4(e), a nonprofit
 7 or public community-based program working in
 8 a social work capacity in an area described in
 9 section 4(e)(1).

10 (3) HIGH NEED AND HIGH DEMAND.—The
 11 term “high need and high demand”, used in ref-
 12 erence to an area or population, means an area with
 13 a population, or a population, respectively, that lacks
 14 sufficient resources and as a result has a greater
 15 probability of being harmed by specific social, envi-
 16 ronmental, or health problems than the population
 17 as a whole. The area or population at issue may be
 18 an area or population defined by the Health Re-
 19 sources and Services Administration as a “health
 20 professional shortage area”, which has a shortage of
 21 primary medical care, dental, or mental health pro-
 22 viders, and is an urban or rural area, a population
 23 group, or a public or nonprofit private medical facil-
 24 ity.

1 (4) RELATED PROFESSIONAL RESEARCHER.—

2 The term “related professional researcher” means a
 3 person who is professionally engaged in research in
 4 a social, political, economic, health, or mental health
 5 field. The research referenced to in this paragraph
 6 is primarily conducted by doctoral level researchers
 7 under university, government, research institute, or
 8 community agency auspices.

9 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
 10 the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

11 (6) SOCIAL WORK.—The term “social work”
 12 means—

13 (A) the professional activity of helping in-
 14 dividuals, groups, or communities enhance or
 15 restore capacity for social and psychosocial
 16 functioning and creating societal conditions fa-
 17 vorable to that enhancement or restoration;

18 (B) an activity, the practice of which con-
 19 sists of the professional application of values,
 20 principles, and techniques related to the profes-
 21 sional activity described in subparagraph (A),
 22 including—

23 (i) diagnosis and treatment of mental
 24 and emotional disorders with individuals,
 25 families, and groups;

1 (ii) helping communities or groups
 2 provide or improve social and health serv-
 3 ices and participating in relevant legislative
 4 processes; and

5 (iii) helping people obtain tangible
 6 services; and

7 (C) an activity, the practice of which re-
 8 quires knowledge of—

9 (i) human development;

10 (ii) behavior of social, economic and
 11 cultural institutions; and

12 (iii) the interaction of the factors de-
 13 scribed in clauses (i) and (ii).

14 (7) SOCIAL WORK RESEARCHER.—The term
 15 “social work researcher” means a person who stud-
 16 ies social work at the individual, family, group, com-
 17 munity, policy, or organizational level, focusing
 18 across the human life span on prevention of, inter-
 19 vention in, treatment of, aftercare of, and rehabilita-
 20 tion from acute and chronic social and psychosocial
 21 conditions, and includes a person examining the ef-
 22 fect of policies on social work practice. The study re-
 23 ferred to in this paragraph is primarily conducted by
 24 researchers with doctoral degrees who are social

1 workers or faculty under university, government, re-
2 search institute, or community agency auspices.

3 (8) SOCIAL WORKER.—The term “social work-
4 er” means a graduate of a school of social work with
5 a baccalaureate, master’s, or doctoral degree, who
6 uses knowledge and skills to provide social work
7 services for clients who may be individuals, families,
8 groups, communities, organizations, or society in
9 general.

○