



**COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION'S  
PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVE:  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS UPDATE**

**REPORT TO THE CSWE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
CSWE SPRING GOVERNANCE MEETING  
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*This status report provided to the CSWE Board of Directors is a summary of federal advocacy and outreach efforts conducted by Lewis-Burke Associates LLC between September 1, 2018 and February 1, 2019.*

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## I. Introduction

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Public Policy Initiative (PPI) advocates and promotes social work education to members of Congress, their staff, federal agencies, and other federal policymakers. Led by Lewis-Burke Associates LLC (Lewis-Burke), the CSWE PPI works purposely and deliberately with the leadership and membership of CSWE to advance the mission and impact of the organization. The CSWE PPI continues to promote CSWE's priorities in higher education, workforce development, social work research, and social and economic justice. Efforts in these areas will continue to build on existing initiatives and outreach, while strategically engaging new opportunities that arise, as we begin a new Congress. The CSWE PPI is also prepared to continue to forcefully address and push back against threats to individual, family, and community well-being.

Elections in November resulted in Democrats taking control of the U.S. House of Representatives. The election also marked numerous firsts, including the first Muslim-American woman elected to Congress, the youngest woman ever elected to Congress, the first Native American woman elected to Congress, and the first Latina elected to Congress from Texas, among others. The CSWE PPI quickly engaged the new Congress, joining the National Association of Social Workers to provide an introduction to both organizations in a joint letter calling attention to, "the critical role the social work profession and social work education play in the everyday lives of your constituents and communities." This was also an opportunity to invite members of Congress to join the Social Work Caucus and strengthen support for social work and the social safety net.

The CSWE PPI is already engaging with the new Congress and will strategically work to cultivate new members of Congress into social work education champions, while partnering with existing champions to promote a social work education agenda. A new Congress creates opportunities for the CSWE PPI, but the reality of divided government means continued challenges to higher education, health care, and vulnerable populations. A divided Congress, with a House and Senate led by different political parties, can make advancing legislation and policies difficult, as exemplified by the latest government shutdown. The CSWE PPI develops strategies to move its priorities forward while being responsive to the pernicious issues impacting social work education. The CSWE PPI can contribute to congressional consensus building by providing valuable insight and advocacy on issues that we expect Congress to approach in a bipartisan manner. Potential issues include reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), healthcare workforce education and training, and addressing public health issues like the opioid crisis. Pernicious issues that the CSWE PPI will continue to push back against include threats to the social safety net, attempts to reduce student aid and water-down accreditation standards, and social justice issues like family separation and the undermining of protections for DACA recipients. The CSWE PPI will engage CSWE leadership, members, and partners in leveraging new opportunities, while staunchly defending against harmful policies.

As outlined in this report, over the last six months, the CSWE PPI has engaged in a robust advocacy agenda and strategy that positions CSWE as a leader in critical higher education issues including programmatic accreditation, federal funding for social work programs, defense of civil rights, promotion of Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), engagement with congressional policymakers, support for CSWE initiatives including the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), and other issues. Activities in these areas support CSWE's work as a national association in not only social work education, but in higher education in general. In the social work research, social justice, and workforce arenas, the CSWE PPI ensures that CSWE has voice and impact on the policies affecting students, educators, practitioners, and

the communities where social workers live and work. Many of these efforts have taken on heightened importance and value in light of threats emanating from the current Administration.

Looking forward, the CSWE PPI is positioned to continue these efforts in defense of CSWE's mission and values. New opportunities and initiatives around highlighting the efficacy of mental health delivery by social workers, increasing student voices in advocacy efforts, continuing engagement in issues like gerontology and Alzheimer's care delivery, emphasizing the role of social work in social determinants, and more will be explored. The CSWE PPI will continue to work to ensure that funding for social work programs is supported in the federal budget process. Additionally, advocacy for vulnerable populations, including DACA recipients, will be a mainstay of the CSWE PPI efforts. Below is a more detailed account of the CSWE PPI's activities over the last six months. Lewis-Burke looks forward to continuing to ensure that CSWE and social work education are included the relevant policy decisions and discussions impacting social work.

## **II. Review of Federal Public Policy Activities**

This section details significant CSWE public policy activities since September 2018 as they pertain to federal agencies, Congress, and the Administration. CSWE and Lewis-Burke work in tandem to further CSWE's mission and advocacy agenda. Please note that this is not a comprehensive compilation of activities and actions. In addition, for the purpose of this report, the term "CSWE PPI" refers to the coordination between Lewis-Burke and CSWE leadership on federal issues.

### **Higher Education Advocacy**

#### ***Shaping Accreditation and Higher Education Policy***

Accreditation continues to receive significant scrutiny from the U.S. Department of Education (ED). ED announced last July its intentions to promulgate new regulations around accreditation and other higher education policies. As part of this process, ED held public hearings to solicit feedback. The CSWE PPI, in coordination with CSWE's Director of Accreditation, Stacey Borasky, prepared the remarks that Director Borasky delivered at a public hearing in September. CSWE also formally submitted the comments, which stated, "Programmatic accreditors recognize the solemn duty and responsibility they have to ensuring fairness, quality, objectivity, and rigor in the accreditation process." ED has framed its interest in accreditation reform as a way to spark innovation in higher education. There is legitimate concern that these efforts could lead to lower quality standards.

The CSWE PPI also worked with Director Borasky to respond to ED's request for negotiators and input on rulemaking committee construction. As background, the Higher Education Act (HEA) requires ED to use a process called "negotiated rulemaking" when making changes to programs authorized by the statute. The rulemaking process involves a neutral facilitator and a negotiating committee comprised of representative stakeholders. The goal of negotiated rulemaking is to have the committee reach consensus, but if the committee does not reach consensus, ED may formulate their own rule. The CSWE PPI consulted with CSWE leadership and determined that nominating Director Borasky to the committee would be in the interest of CSWE and programmatic accreditors writ large. The nomination letter stated, "CSWE is nominating Dr. Borasky because of her extensive direct experience and knowledge of accreditation and the oversight responsibilities of accrediting agencies; her insight into the recognition process of accrediting agencies; her involvement in the oversight responsibilities accrediting agencies

play within the regulatory triad; and her knowledge of the regulations and technical components of accreditation and related topics.” While the nomination was not accepted, the CSWE PPI continues to track the negotiated rulemaking sessions which began in January and engage ED. The CSWE PPI will submit comments when the proposed final regulations are released.

### ***Highlighting the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program***

Protecting and promoting the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program is a mainstay of the CSWE PPI’s advocacy and policy agenda. PSLF forms part of the student aid advocacy that is critical to ensuring access to social work education. Recent HEA proposals and Presidential budget requests have proposed eliminating the program. PSLF encourages social work professionals to pursue opportunities in critical high-needs areas. Recognizing this service through programs like PSLF will allow more students to pursue the profession and achieve important financial milestones in their own lives. The CSWE PPI is an active member of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Coalition. By working with a diverse group of organizations devoted to public service, the CSWE PPI is able to ensure that social work educators, students, and professionals are represented and included in the Coalition’s grassroots initiatives. Recent actions include signing CSWE onto a letter from the Coalition concerning the Temporary Expansion of Public Service Loan Forgiveness (TEPSLF) program, and providing feedback on Coalition letters to Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and members of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. The CSWE PPI will continue to advocate for this vital program with federal policymakers. Issues that will be important to defend include ensuring that the program is maintained in an HEA reauthorization, that ED faithfully implements both TESPLF and PSLF, and that access to the program is improved, especially as it relates to servicing.

### ***Resisting Regulatory Rollbacks***

A common theme from the current Administration and ED has been undoing existing regulations. While in some cases regulatory relief is needed, regulations often exist to protect vulnerable populations and ensure accountability for federal resources. While much of the CSWE PPI focus and activity in this space relates to accreditation regulations, it is important to defend the civil rights of students and ensure that federal resources only go to high quality institutions and programs. To that extent, the CSWE PPI has been actively monitoring and engaging higher education policymakers. This includes monitoring ED’s “Rethinking Higher Education” initiatives, which are based on the premise that the U.S. has “a higher education model that is fundamentally unchanged.” This model is equated with being out of sync with real world experience and workplace demands. ED has also decried credential creep and relationships between accreditors and licensing boards as limiting pathways into professions. These are areas where the CSWE PPI will need to engage further.

Title IX regulations, which govern sexual assault and campus safety, are also likely to be renegotiated this year. The CSWE PPI submitted comments to ED calling for the new regulations to focus more on protecting survivors than applying judicial overtones to the issue. Responding to interest from CSWE members, and furthering the profession’s goal of social justice, the CSWE PPI sent a letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), objecting to efforts by the Administration to define gender as an unchangeable biological condition determined by genitalia at birth. The letter was also sent to federal cabinet secretaries and respective Office of Civil Rights directors. In the area of promoting CSWE as a national higher education association, the CSWE PPI has worked with Dr. Darla Spence Coffey, CSWE President and CEO, in exploring membership in the Washington Higher Education Secretariat (WHES). WHES is a forum for associations to consider strategic issues and to review trends and challenges confronting higher education.

## Health-Care Advocacy

### ***Protecting Health-Care Workforce Programs Vital to the Social Work Community***

The CSWE PPI continued its advocacy efforts to protect federal funding for health-related education and training programs that support schools and programs of social work. More specifically, the CSWE PPI worked closely with key social work champions in Congress to advocate for CSWE's funding priorities throughout the fiscal year (FY) 2019 appropriations process. The CSWE PPI leveraged relationships in the offices of long-time supporters Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Representative G.K. Butterfield (D-NC). Additionally, the CSWE PPI engaged in activities to cultivate and maintain relationships with new CSWE champions, including Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Representative John Katko (R-NY), and Representative Katherine Clark (D-MA) to help further protect critical programs which ensure a strong social work health professions workforce.

Following the submittal of CSWE's FY 2019 federal funding requests to the House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-HHS-ED) Appropriations Subcommittees, the CSWE PPI mobilized a congressional strategy to further advocate for its funding priorities. The CSWE PPI primarily focused its efforts around continuous support for the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program, the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP), the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), and Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students (SDS), given proposals to cut these programs in the President's FY 2019 budget request. The following illustrate successful outcomes as a result of the CSWE PPI's advocacy efforts:

- Regarding funding for the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program, the final FY 2019 funding package for the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education maintained increased levels for the program. However, the CSWE PPI was concerned with ambiguous language accompanying the bill that directed funding for the program to be distributed "relatively equally" among participating health professions. The CSWE PPI was concerned with this language because similar language was previously included in 2016 that resulted in the exclusion of schools and programs of social work from the program. The CSWE PPI worked closely with Representative Barbara Lee's office, as well as Senate appropriations subcommittee staff, to successfully have the language removed in the final FY 2019 spending package. The language was replaced with new language drafted by the CSWE PPI to protect schools and programs of social work. More specifically, the language prohibits placing limits on social work participation and funding in the BHWET program and urges the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to maintain the integrity of the program as an open competition for all eligible entities. The final FY 2019 spending package, which included the CSWE PPI's language, was signed into law in September 2018.
- Regarding funding for the MFP, the CSWE PPI's advocacy efforts contributed to an overall increase for the MFP program in the final FY 2019 spending package. The CSWE PPI continues to serve as a leading voice for the MFP coalition of current grantees to help increase funding for the program. In November 2018, the CSWE PPI engaged with Representative Butterfield, a long-time champion for the MFP, to express appreciation for his continuous support for the social work community. Additionally, this meeting provided an opportunity to discuss how to work together in the next Congress on upcoming priority areas in mental and behavioral health, substance use, and health disparities.
- Regarding the GWEP program and the SDS program, funding was maintained for both programs in the final FY 2019 appropriations package.

### ***Maintaining an Active Voice in Meeting Mental and Behavioral Health and Substance Use Needs***

The CSWE PPI continued its federal advocacy efforts to build support around social work education, mental and behavioral health, and substance use. In October 2018, the CSWE PPI organized and facilitated meetings with senior leaders at relevant agencies overseeing programs of importance to CSWE.

The CSWE PPI organized and facilitated a meeting between Dr. Darla Spence Coffey, CSWE President and CEO, and Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The meeting provided an opportunity to showcase CSWE's diligence in addressing SAMHSA's emerging national priorities, including substance use disorders and mental and behavioral health. The meeting also presented an opportunity to clarify social work's role in addressing the opioid crisis, in response to Assistant Secretary McCance-Katz's comments on the need to strengthen curriculum and training for social workers regarding substance use disorders. Additional priority areas for Dr. McCance-Katz were also addressed, including the role of social work in addressing Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and school safety.

The CSWE PPI also organized and facilitated a meeting between Dr. Darla Spence Coffey and CAPT Sophia Russell, Director of the Division of Nursing and Public Health within the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The meeting served as an opportunity to establish a relationship with new leadership overseeing programs important to the social work workforce, particularly the BHWET program. Further, the CSWE PPI was able to demonstrate to HRSA its ability to influence Congress on important factors impacting the BHWET program in alignment the program's original intent, such as ensuring that BHWET continues operating as an openly competitive program.

## **Social Work Research Advocacy**

In 2016, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) began collaborating on government relations to increase the impact of unified messaging and consistent, coordinated federal advocacy. This partnership provides opportunities to leverage key relationships that CSWE has formed over the last several years to expand social work research advocacy. Through the CSWE PPI, Lewis-Burke expands CSWE and SSWR's government relations strategy for social work research and enhances relationships with key federal agency and congressional officials to shape federal investment, policies, and programs for social and behavioral science research. As CSWE and SSWR advocate for investment in and the application of social work research in the incoming 116<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Trump Administration, the CSWE PPI will continue to expand CSWE and SSWR's government relations strategy for this field and elevate the conversation around the importance of social and behavioral science research.

### ***Raising the Profile of Social Work Research***

In December, CSWE and SSWR submitted a joint response to a request for input (RFI) from the National Institute on Aging (NIA) within the National Institutes for Health (NIH) on topics they should be integrating into their next strategic plan. While RFIs do not guarantee the respondents' priorities will be included, they help make the reviewers aware of the position and priorities of the societies, with the hope that they will be incorporated to some extent. CSWE and SSWR are very supportive of the NIA's mission of addressing the social, economic, and biomedical challenges to promoting the health and well-being of older adults. One of the recommendations is an increased prioritization of stakeholder input,

an area in which social work researchers are well-positioned to assist. The letter also encourages NIA to help leverage technology with careful reflection upon ways it can help increase access to quality care without increasing health disparities. The CSWE PPI continues to look for ways to influence the aging agenda.

### ***Engaging Research Coalitions***

CSWE and SSWR are members of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) and are active in Friends of NIH Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (NIH BSSR), a coalition of social and behavioral science organizations that support NIH's Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research's (OBSSR) mission and programs. Participation in this community positions both organizations to advocate for social work research in social and behavioral science research policy conversations. Representing CSWE and SSWR in multiple coalitions also helps amplify our messaging and positions to broader stakeholder groups through activities like sign-on letters supporting or opposing actions by Congress and the Administration.

## **Social Justice Advocacy**

### ***Ensuring an Accurate Census***

In August, CSWE, along with nearly 80,000 other groups and individuals, responded to a call for public comments by the Department of Commerce regarding the proposed inclusion of a question regarding citizenship on the 2020 Census without having conducted research on the potential impact of this inclusion. Given that the Census is required by the Constitution to determine "actual Enumeration" rather than explicitly measuring citizenship, the inherent risks to a complete response rate are significant as this has not been researched appropriately. Furthermore, the Census is used to determine the distribution of nearly \$700 billion in federal funding based on the results of this survey.

While there have not been further opportunities to publicly weigh in on this issue, CSWE PPI continues to closely track the progress of this issue as it winds through the courts. Given the increasing threats from this Administration to even legal immigrants who have become citizens since this story broke in the spring, it remains a priority.

### ***Addressing Family Separation and School Safety***

The CSWE PPI has been engaged on the issue of school safety as it relates to mental health and gun violence. This has included working with the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) and coordinating the nomination of Julie Rhoads, CSWE Director of Education Initiatives and Research, to the NASW School Violence Policy Statement revision committee. While there was some hope that the final report released by the Federal Commission on School Safety would include recommendations to expand access to mental health in schools, the report rather focused on school discipline policies. The CSWE PPI will continue to look for opportunities that support expanding mental health access in K-12 school and recognize the public health aspect of gun violence.

## **III. Coalition Activities**

### ***Eldercare Workforce Alliance Public Policy Committee (EWA PPC)***

The CSWE PPI actively contributes to the work of the Eldercare Workforce Alliance (EWA) Public Policy Committee (PPC). EWA is a coalition of 31 national organizations, including CSWE, working to support



policies aimed at improving the eldercare workforce. Participation includes representing CSWE on EWA PPC bimonthly calls, attending the EWA Full Alliance meetings, and making recommendations on EWA policy activities to CSWE. On December 12, Dr. Darla Spence Coffey, CSWE President and CEO, and the CSWE PPI attended EWA's biannual full alliance meeting. The meeting provided members an opportunity to review EWA's objectives and achievements; discuss communications policies and regulatory strategies; and address governance and operational issues. Several government officials also presented on federal programs of importance to CSWE members, including Nina Tumosa of HRSA, who updated the group on recent funding opportunities for the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) and the Geriatrics Academics Career Award (GACA) Program. Other topics of discussion included an update on geriatrics training legislation in the Senate, the need to incorporate social determinants in the Alliance's future materials, and immigration policies impacting caregivers.

#### ***Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC)***

An important part of strengthening federal funding for health professions programs includes making sure that social work is included among other health professions in policymaking. To further these efforts, the CSWE PPI remains an active member of the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC). HPNEC is a coalition of over 60 national organizations representing schools, programs, health professionals, and students dedicated to ensuring a well-trained healthcare workforce. The CSWE PPI actively participates in HPNEC's monthly calls and meetings to weigh in on and support the Coalition's Title VII funding and authorization strategies. Additionally, a member of the CSWE PPI was appointed as an "Executive Committee" member of HPNEC to help further shape the coalition's directions in the upcoming year.

#### ***Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)***

CSWE is an active member of the Mental Health Liaison Group, which is a coalition of mental health and addiction stakeholders and organizations with a federal focus on elevating the conversation around mental health and addiction. MHLG works to provide input to policymakers on legislation, influence their mental health and addiction agenda, as well as join together to promote activities and policies that support the mission of the MHLG. The CSWE PPI attended MHLG's annual meeting in December and was involved in the group's efforts to address the Administration's efforts to define gender.

#### ***Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Coalition***

MFP representatives from the grantee organizations continue to meet and correspond regularly through the MFP Coalition. The government relations representatives from the grantee organizations meet regularly to discuss how best to advocate for funding, and how to coordinate MFP policy efforts in Congress. The CSWE PPI coordinated an MFP Coalition thank you letter to Representative Butterfield (D-NC), who is a champion for the MFP program, and Representative Katko (R-NY). Efforts like these are important in expressing appreciation for the work and support Members of Congress provide to important social work programs. Additionally, the CSWE PPI attended meetings with the coalition on Capitol Hill to advocate for increased funding for the MFP and is in the process of planning for 2019 advocacy activities on Capitol Hill.

#### ***Federation of Associations of Schools of Health Professionals (FASHP)***

The CSWE PPI is a member of the Federation of Associations of Schools of Health Professionals (FASHP), which works on a variety of issues, including improving federal loan and repayment programs for healthcare professionals, ensuring that any *Higher Education Act* (HEA) reauthorization is beneficial for students, and elevating the national importance of interprofessional education. Activities by the coalition include providing feedback on letters to members of Congress and attending meetings with

congressional offices and committee staff. These actions help to keep social workers at the table for advocacy on student debt and other issues of importance to social work students, as well as making sure social workers are not left out of coalition advocacy related to topics such as appropriations for research and education, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, threats to independent accreditation, and interprofessional education.

#### ***Executive Agency Advocacy Groups***

The CSWE PPI continues to look for new communities in which to raise the profile of social work and social work research, and groups with which there is an alignment with CSWE priorities in an effort to help amplify the message of the important role social workers play across a wide range of federal priorities. To that end, CSWE has joined the “Friends of NIA,” an advocacy coalition which supports the National Institute on Aging (NIA), and looks forward to opportunities for engagement in 2019.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The CSWE PPI looks forward to promoting and defending CSWE’s mission in a changing political landscape. It is imperative in this climate to consider opportunities to advance CSWE’s priorities in education, workforce, social work research, and social and economic justice. Taking advantage of these opportunities also entails identifying real threats to the mission of CSWE, its members, and communities. A new Congress and an approaching presidential election are two elements that will particularly shape these opportunities and threats. As detailed in this report and the examples of successful advocacy and agenda setting, the CSWE PPI is well-positioned to advance social work education, research, and social and economic justice. Continued success in these areas will require continued collaboration with CSWE leadership and leveraging the voices and expertise of members. The CSWE PPI stands ready to advance the cause of social work education and research in 2019 and beyond.