



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK
Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

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The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Susan A. Davis
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education
and Workforce Development
U.S. House of Representatives

December 11, 2017

Dear Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, Chairman Guthrie, and Ranking Member Davis:

Thank you for allowing the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to provide input as the House Committee on Education and the Workforce prepares to mark up HR 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

As you may know, CSWE is a national association representing social work education in the United States. CSWE's membership consists of more than 2,500 individual members and more than 700 accredited master's and baccalaureate programs of professional social work education. CSWE supports quality social work education and the role that social workers play in achieving the profession's goals of social and economic justice. CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA) is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States and its territories. Social work education prepares students for leadership and professional interdisciplinary practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities in a wide array of service sectors, such as health, mental health, substance abuse, adult and juvenile justice, PK-12 education, child welfare, aging, and others.

CSWE acknowledges that the PROSPER Act proposes important reforms to higher education. However, the organization has several concerns about provisions included in the bill. CSWE appreciates the Committee's dedication to ensuring that higher education continues to be an accessible and effective means of promoting equity and social justice. This is seen in the PROSPER Act provisions regarding completion, including a Pell Grant bonus and increased Federal Work Study funding. The elimination of the federal definition of *credit hour* is a welcomed proposal. As a programmatic accreditor, CSWE is also heartened to see that HR 4508 will allow accreditors to focus on student learning and education outcomes. CSWE's COA has been committed to this approach with its own accreditation standards, which since 2008 have had a competency-based framework.

Although the PROSPER Act makes important strides in encouraging completion and reducing regulatory burden, the bill also will increase the cost of education for many students. Student assistance programs and policies are crucial for social workers who complete years of schooling to serve the public good in positions that regularly provide low wages. Graduate students, in particular, could face increased costs due to the loss of access to Federal Work Study funds, the elimination of Grad PLUS loans, and the reduction in available loan funds. Additionally, the loss of loan forgiveness in repayment plans, including the elimination of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, will raise costs for students.



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PSLF is essential to encouraging graduates to go into nonprofit public service, where there is a great need for social workers. For example, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics the need for social workers will grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2024, particularly for health care, mental health, and substance abuse social workers. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest employer of master's level social workers in the United States.¹ Social workers at the VA would lose eligibility for loan forgiveness through PSLF under this bill. CSWE believes there are changes that could be made to PSLF to improve its effectiveness, but eliminating the program is not a viable solution.

CSWE appreciates the important attention the PROSPER Act brings to the issue of sexual assault on campuses, but is concerned about which professionals could be qualified sexual assault survivor counselors as identified in the bill. CSWE and other health-professional associations urge the Committee to ensure that properly trained individuals, such as social workers and psychologists, can fill these important roles. CSWE offers its experience as a resource in this and other areas.

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Social work education, and higher education in general, contribute to this well-being. CSWE looks forward to working with the Committee as you continue your important work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Darla Spence Coffey'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Darla Spence Coffey
President and Chief Executive Officer

¹ https://www.socialwork.va.gov/VA_Employment.asp