

Chairwoman Carolyn McCarthy  
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Hearing, July 29, 2008: "Caring for the Vulnerable: The State of Social Work in America"  
Opening Statement

I want to thank each of you for being here today for this informational hearing on the state of social work on America.

Social work is a profession involving the education, treatment, care, support, and often nurturing of vulnerable individuals and families with the objective of assisting or guiding them on how to improve their lives.

The average person's image of a social worker is someone who is very passionate about what they do in the face of challenging, difficult, and even horrific situations and whose work results in life-changing experiences, all while being underpaid and underappreciated.

I am not sure if this is exactly the case for each social worker in America, and that is why we are having this hearing today – to educate the Subcommittee on the state of social work.

The 2008-2009 edition of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook states that social work employment is expected to grow faster than average and that a master's degree in social work or a related field has become standard for many positions.

Furthermore, it is expected that opportunities for employment in the social work profession should be good in rural areas and competitive in urban areas. In 2006 there were five hundred ninety-five thousand social workers and that number is projected to reach seven hundred twenty seven thousand by the year 2016.

Each area of social work is expected to experience a growth in projected employment, with some areas expecting a larger increase than others. For example, it is expected that as the Baby Boom generation ages that there will be a greater demand for health and related social services. Clearly, if you are a young person looking at job opportunities in the future, social work is a field to consider. However, that being said, most people don't know what social work is and what social workers do in a given day.

Social workers engage in many fields and in many locations, including working with children, families, the elderly, those who are incarcerated or at risk of incarceration, those facing serious or life-threatening illness, those with mental health or substance abuse challenges, and with public health organizations and agencies. Social workers also engage in public policy and government.

We have six social workers in Congress, including my colleague Congresswoman Shea-Porter who is on this Subcommittee and here today. I employ a licensed social worker on my staff in my district. I think that somehow nearly all of us are connected to or have interacted with a social worker in some capacity.

Today we will learn about the various fields of social work, an overview of the profession, and perspectives on the state of the profession through the lenses of education, research, diversity, and on-the-ground experience.

Again, I want to thank each of you for attending the hearing and I look forward to your testimony.