



## **MHAction Education Module #1, 2017 - Social Security: Frances Perkins and the Origins of Social Security Act, and Current Threats to Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare**

### Module contains:

- Links to educational information on Frances Perkins and guiding questions (below)
- One-pager – “[Debunking Myths about Social Security](#)”
- One-pager – “[Threats to Social Security and Medicaid/Medicare](#)”
- Social Security “[Pop-Quiz](#)” and [answer sheet](#).
- Online Actions to protect [Social Security](#) and [Medicaid/Medicare](#).
- If you’d like to go further then writing your representative, we also encourage you to call and tell them how you feel. You can use the message included in your letter, and let them know why Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare and other programs that ensure basic needs are met for children, low-income families, veterans, the disabled, and seniors, are important to you.

### Suggestions for using this toolkit:

- Plan a community event, either a meeting in a clubhouse, or a small meeting in your home.
  - Introduce the purpose of coming together, and then listen to the segments on Frances Perkins together.
  - After reviewing the information on Frances Perkins, spend 15-20 discussing what you learned, using the guiding questions below. You could have this conversation group, or split into small groups of 3-4 people.
  - Next pass out the “pop quiz”, give people time to work on this as individuals or in small groups, and then review the answers as a group, allowing people a chance to shout out their guesses. (you could also give out small prizes to make this part fun)
  - Pass out the one-pagers, and again give people the opportunity to discuss, either as a full group, or in small groups.
  - Bring a computer, so that at the end of the meeting people can take action using the online petition and letter writing tools.

For more information, please contact MHAction at [info@mhaction.org](mailto:info@mhaction.org)  
[www.mhaction.org](http://www.mhaction.org)



### Frances Perkins

Frances Perkins was the primary force behind the creation of the social safety net. She served as Secretary of Labor (the first woman to hold a cabinet-level position) under Franklin D Roosevelt.

- Read this article and/or listen to the 8-minute segment from NPR on Frances Perkins, aired on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Social Security Act:  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4795737>
- Listen to segments of Frances Perkins' 1962 speech, entitled "The Roots of Social Security". The full speech is excellent, but quite long. We recommend listening from minutes 13-18:20, 21-32:32, and 1hr14 – end:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6UcjnAFHsQ>

### Extra Reading

- If you are interested in reaching Perkins' full speech it is available at:  
<https://www.ssa.gov/history/perkins5.html>

### *Questions to consider:*

- Social Security, and other components of the "New Deal" are often thought of as projects of Franklin D Roosevelt. How does learning about the other people behind these programs change our understanding of history?
- What does Perkins consider to be the most important factor leading to the passage of the Social Security Act? What lessons can be drawn from this that could be helpful in our organizing work today, (discussed in first recommended segment minutes 13-18:20)?
- Perkins mentions "plans" that she found on her desk when she took her position, and the influence of the "Townsend Plan", (discussed in second recommended segment, minutes 21-32:32). What does this tell us about Perkins' perspective on the role of the public in policy making?
- To Perkins, universal healthcare was an important aspect of the social insurance, that was left of the Social Security Act because the committee ran out time prior to introducing the Act. While it was discussed in the years immediately after, more limited health coverage programs, Medicaid and Medicare, were not added to the Social Security Act until 1965. How has the conversation around healthcare changed since the 1930s, is universal healthcare still something we should strive for as a country? Should Medicaid and Medicare be expanded? How do you think healthcare coverage should be handled?

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