

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 110TH CONGRESS

January 2007 – December 2008

Background

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the world's largest membership organization of professional social workers, with chapters in every state and members in every congressional district. NASW seeks to promote federal legislation and policies that support effective social work practice, enhance the lives of the people we serve, and promote fairness and well-being. Professional social workers contribute a unique perspective to the social policy debate, one that includes the relationship between public policies and the people affected by them.

Social Work Expertise

NASW has 150,000 members who work in a wide range of settings at all levels in both the public and private sectors. Professional social work is a distinct profession with rigorous, specialized education and training requirements, state licensure, credentialing, and ethical standards. Depending on the requirements of the particular practice setting, social workers may hold bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees in social work.

Professional social workers practice in many areas, including health, mental health, aging, education, family services, child welfare, public welfare, community organizing, public policy, and private practice. Social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health providers and are often the only providers in medically underserved areas.

NASW remains concerned about a broad range of issues that affect the quality of life for people both nationally and internationally, and also about the ability of professional social workers to provide quality services. During the 110th Congress, we will focus our legislative advocacy in the areas of the social work reinvestment initiative, health, mental health, aging, children and families, economic security, and, civil rights. The Association also will work to ensure that the role of professional social workers and social work research is acknowledged, protected, and supported in federal legislation.

Social Work Reinvestment Initiative

National study data warn of an impending shortage of licensed social workers that threaten the future availability of these vital professional services. Assuring a sufficient supply of professional social workers and ensuring job satisfaction are critical reinvestments the nation must make in this profession. NASW will be undertaking several legislative strategies to support these national goals. These strategies include expanding the availability of loan forgiveness programs for social workers, increasing payments for professional services to increase job satisfaction and retention, eradicating regulatory and payment barriers to effective practice, strengthening Title IV-E training to include social work education and training through broad range of public and private universities, agencies, and organizations. NASW will continue to support legislation establishing the National Center for Social Work Research, which would conduct social services research into interdisciplinary and integrated service delivery by social workers and other providers. Lastly, NASW will seek strengthening amendments of Title VII of the Public Health Service Act to ensure that social work students and social work schools are eligible for a broad range of training and curriculum development programs.

NASW will continue to work with other organizations in the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) Coalition to secure access to programs that support social work research and training, such as Title IV-E funding and loan forgiveness for social workers. In addition, NASW will join ANSWER Coalition members in their continued efforts to establish a national center for social work research, and in their work on both welfare reform and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and the Health Professions Education Act (HPEA).

As in the past, NASW will work to preserve and promote professional social work practice, continued recognition by the public and private sectors of professional social workers as health and behavioral health care providers, and the right of all individuals to seek and receive professional social work services. Similarly, NASW will support Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) initiatives that improve access to quality care for consumers of all ages and empower clinicians to render the most appropriate clinical care to their patients. The Association will specifically focus on improving Medicare payments for clinical social workers, including those seeking to provide services to residents in skilled nursing facilities.

Health, Mental Health and Aging

NASW holds that all individuals have the right to affordable, accessible, and high-quality health care. Likewise, the Association believes in universal access to the full continuum of health and mental health services including, but not limited to: mental health treatment, prescription drug coverage, trauma and disaster services, chronic disease management, substance abuse prevention and treatment, wellness care, case management, home health care, long-term care, and end-of-life care.

Accordingly, NASW will continue to strongly support efforts to expand health insurance coverage to the underinsured and uninsured, and we will oppose initiatives that would further fragment the health insurance marketplace. Another high priority for NASW is to protect funding for key federal safety net programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

NASW will also work to close the imbalances related to health disparities among all populations. NASW will remain vigilant regarding other important issues such as the use and disclosure of confidential medical information, ensuring quality care for veterans and active duty military personnel, and the maintenance of choice in reproductive health.

Children and Families

NASW will continue to support a strong federal role in, and adequate funding for, child welfare programs such as the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program (CAPTA), and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), worker training programs, and improvements to the child welfare system such as reducing the disproportionate number of African American and other children of color in the child welfare system. The Association will concentrate its efforts on promoting policies that protect the best interests of children, including the use of qualified staff and reasonable workloads that permit adequate contact with children and families.

Economic Security

NASW supports proposals to protect the long term viability of Social Security for all Americans, and proposals to protect and improve the system for low-wage workers, women, children, people of color, and people with disabilities. In addition, the Association will seek enactment of proposals to increase opportunities for ownership of financial assets, raise the federal minimum wage, and require equal pay for equal work.

NASW supports federal tax, budget, and spending mechanisms that help to narrow the gaps in resources available to people at different income levels as well as provide an adequate safety net for those unable to provide for themselves. Such federal mechanisms should not include budget policies

that arbitrarily cap spending for human needs or fold critical federal programs serving vulnerable individuals into block grants to states or localities.

Civil and Human Rights

NASW supports full civil and human rights for all people and opposes public policies that alienate individuals by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, age, physical or mental abilities, marital status, sexual orientation, or religious belief. NASW will support or oppose federal judicial nominees based on the Association's public policies and the core values of the profession. The Association is strongly in favor of non-violent approaches to conflict resolution whenever possible.

NASW will continue to support strong federal policies, including affirmative action, and international treaties and conventions aimed at addressing discrimination based on race and gender. The Association also will advocate for proposals, such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), to prevent family violence and provide support to its victims. NASW will continue to support immigration reform proposals that unify families, engender pathways to citizenship, and provide viable opportunities to attain economic, social, and political equality. In addition, NASW will urge Congress to extend the promise of equal opportunity to all citizens, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons through the passage of such measures as the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA) and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA).

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