



March 14, 2016

### **Improving Access to Mental Health Act**

Since launching our action alert in October, 2015, 1,634 advocates sent 5,335 emails to Congress about the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173/H.R. 3712)*. You can find the alert on our [web site](#).

Thanks to advocacy from our Connecticut Chapter, Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) has co-sponsored the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173)*.

Co-sponsors of the legislation include: (\*\* indicates original sponsor; \* indicates original cosponsor)

#### *Senate*

- Sen. Stabenow, Debbie [D-MI]\*\* 10/08/2015
- Sen. Mikulski, Barbara A. [D-MD]\* 10/08/2015
- Sen. Murphy, Christopher S. [D-CT] 02/25/2016

#### *House of Representatives*

- Rep. Lee, Barbara [D-CA-13]\*\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Ashford, Brad [D-NE-2] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Bordallo, Madeleine Z. [D-GU-At Large]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Brown, Corrine [D-FL-5]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Clarke, Yvette D. [D-NY-9]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Cohen, Steve [D-TN-9] 10/16/2015

- Rep. Grijalva, Raul M. [D-AZ-3]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Gutierrez, Luis V. [D-IL-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Honda, Michael M. [D-CA-17]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. McCollum, Betty [D-MN-4] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Moore, Gwen [D-WI-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Norton, Eleanor Holmes [D-DC-At Large]\* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Schakowsky, Janice D. [D-IL-9] 10/20/2015
- Rep. Watson Coleman, Bonnie [D-NJ-12]\* 10/08/2015

NASW has secured supporters of the legislation, listed below:

- American Geriatrics Society
- Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
- Clinical Social Work Association
- Council on Social Work Education
- Justice in Aging
- NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
- National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
- National Coalition for Care Coordination (N3C)
- National League for Nursing
- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

Social work students who attended the Social Work Student Advocacy Day advocated for the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173/H.R. 3712)*. See story below.

At the Mental Health Liaison Group meeting, NASW staff thanked Sen. Stabenow's staff for her introduction of the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173)*.

### **Other Legislative Activity**

In late January, NASW submitted comments on improving chronic care for Medicare beneficiaries to the Senate Committee on Finance's Bipartisan Chronic Care Working Group. You can find the comments [here](#).

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee released a Bipartisan Staff Discussion Draft of the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 in advance of a committee markup of the legislation next Wednesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. NASW will continue to monitor and update you on this and other mental health bills in both the House and Senate.

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (S. 524/H.R. 953) passed the Senate in early March. It has to pass the House before it can be signed by the President. The act will, among other things:

- Expand prevention and educational efforts to prevent the use of opioids and heroin and to promote treatment and recovery

- Expand recovery support for students in high school or enrolled in institutions of higher learning
- Expand and develop community-based recovery supports across the country
- Strengthen prescription drug monitoring programs to help states monitor and track prescription drug diversion and to help at-risk individuals access services

NASW is working with Facing Addiction to support this legislation.

### **Appropriations Language**

NASW has submitted appropriations language to the Senate and House. We submitted language to urge the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services to ensure access to these services by considering methods to promote the provision of health and behavior assessment and intervention services by clinical social workers.

We also submitted language to recommend that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Health Resources and Services Administration require training in appropriate safety protocols at programs receiving Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training grants.

Finally, we submitted language to recommend that the Department of Health and Human Services directly charge the cost of Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) education to Title IV-E and eliminating the cumbersome process of cost allocating the expenses based on the percent of a worker's caseload that is Title IV-E eligible.

### **Meetings in and around the Hill**

NASW worked with the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy, the Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work, the Council on Social Work Education, the Clinical Social Work Association and the Association of Social Work Boards on two events in early March.

On March 1, 400 social work students from 45 schools participated in a Social Work Student Advocacy Day. They met with hill offices to discuss the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173/H.R. 3712)*. Students were welcomed by social worker, Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA-13) and NASW CEO, Dr. Angelo McClain, LICSW. NASW Senior Field Organizer, Dina Kastner participated in a panel where she discussed advocacy strategies.

On March 2, social workers attended two events. In the morning, attendees heard from panelists about voter empowerment. Panelists included social worker, Khaliyl Lane, Legislative Correspondent in Sen. Blumenthal's (D-CT) office; social worker Tanya Rhodes Smith, Director, Nancy Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work; Ari Berman, journalist and author of [Give Us the Ballot](#); and Jason Green, co-founder, Senior Vice President and General Counsel at SkillSmart. The panel was moderated by NASW Vice President, Mildred "Mit" Joyner.

In the afternoon, a reception in the Capitol Visitor's Center included remarks from former member of Congress, Edolphus "Ed" Towns, MSW, and NASW CEO, Dr. Angelo McClain, LICSW.

## **Meetings with the Administration**

NASW staff participated in monthly HHS Providers meeting. The meeting addresses issues related to vulnerable populations as they relate to access to health and mental health related concerns from a providers perspective.

NASW staff joined a coalition that met with the White House Office of Public Engagement on the issue of abuses committed by School Resource Officers. NASW staff was a part of a presentation that the role of social work as an alternative to police involvement in schools.

NASW staff is a member of the drug policy reform coalition that met with the Office of National Control Policy. The coalition is meeting in response to the United Nation General Assembly Special Session initiative dealing with the worldwide drug epidemic.

## **Coalition Work**

NASW staff participated in discussions and planning activities related to the Justice Roundtable quarterly meeting. The Justice Roundtable is a coalition of 90 criminal justice advocacy and policy organizations;

NASW staff participated in following working group meetings:

- Reentry Working Group
- Sentencing Reform Work Group
- Federal Clemency Work Group
- Racial Profiling Work Group
- Police Reform Working Group

NASW staff participated as an active member of the Transportation Equity Task Force. The task force is comprised of over 100 national organizations dealing with economic and racial disparities related to a broad range of transportation issues

NASW staff attended and participated in Judicial Nominations Coalition. The Coalition is comprised of over 50 national organizations. Its current priority is advocating for hearings for President Obama's selection for replacing Justice Scalia on the Supreme Court.

NASW staff participated in and contributed to the National Gun Violence Working Group. The group's current focus in getting Congress to lift the ban on allowing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct research on gun violence.

NASW staff participates and is active in a coalition submitting an Amicus Brief on the Deferred Action on Parents of Americans Immigration case. The coalition will continue meet until the case is ruled on by the Supreme Court of the United States.

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

NASW staff attended the March MHLG meeting. Below are the topics discussed.

1. Scoring Preventative Services (H.R. 3660); Danielle Steele, Senior Health Policy Advisor, Office of Congressman Michael Burgess (R-TX-26)

Rep. Burgess reintroduced his bill to improve the role of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in scoring health bills that have a preventative effect. Currently legislation cannot be scored to reflect the long-term savings that a preventative health effort may have. The bill is narrowly tailored. They have received some pushback from conservatives who worry this would be abused. A member of the MHLG asked if Rep. Burgess has had discussions with leadership yet, but they have not. The committees of jurisdiction are aware of the bill.

A member of the MHLG also asked about rulemaking on the Medicaid and CHIP managed care proposed rule. Danielle noted that they are encouraged that the agency asked for feedback. The proposed rule should come out soon.

2. Expand Excellence in Mental Health Act (S. 2525); Kim Corbin, Legislative Counsel, Office of Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Desiree Mowry, Legislative Assistant, Office of Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO)

The legislation will expand access to mental health services through Medicaid planning grants. Sen. Blunt is interested in mental health because it is the right thing to do, it is good for the taxpayer and for the economy. Sen. Stabenow's father had bi-polar and it was a decade before he got the doctor and medication he needed.

Any state that wants to participate should be able to participate. Currently it is a 2 year demonstration with 24 applicants. The program has capacity to serve 8 states at \$1.1 billion. The President's budget added 6 states. They are looking for groups to endorse the bill.

They are working with the CBO on the high score. The Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee will be marking up the bill.

NASW staff thanked Sen. Stabenow's office for introducing the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173)*. Kim noted that they are excited about expanding who can provide care for mental health.

3. Discussion of Pending Legislation within Energy and Commerce; Waverly Gordon, Professional Staff, House Energy and Commerce Committee, Democratic Staff

Rep. Gene Green (D-TX-29) has introduced mental health legislation along with other members of the Energy and Commerce Committee. Conversations are ongoing about the legislation. Waverly suggested that groups weigh in on the legislation and let them know where the community agrees.

4. Coalition Updates

Laurel Stine of the American Psychological Association and Debbie Plotnick of Mental Health America were re-elected as co-chairs of the MHLG Health Policy Committee.

### **Support Letters**

NASW has signed onto a number of letters of support. You can find a list of letters of support on our [web page](#). A sample of letters from February is below.

- [NASW signs on to open letter urging Senate and House appropriators to allocate as high a funding level as possible in fiscal year 2017 to the 302\(b\) allocation, which funds programs under Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies \(2/22/2016\)](#)
- [NASW joins national voters rights advocates challenging a federal ruling permitting potentially restrictive changes to the federal voter registration policies by Kansas, Georgia, and Alabama Date: \(02/11/2016\)](#)
- [NASW signs onto letter supporting Sens. Stabenow and Peters' Amendment to provide immediate infrastructure funding relief and to examine through further study the long-term impacts of lead exposure in Flint, MI \(02/09/16\)](#)

NASW has also submitted its own comments to the Administration. You can find this list on our [web page](#) as well. The comments from January are below.

- [NASW submits comments to the Senate Finance Committee on improving care for Medicare beneficiaries with chronic conditions \(1/28/2016\)](#)