



LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 111TH CONGRESS

January 2009 – December 2010

Context

The theme of the 2008 electoral season was change. Now that Barack Obama has been elected President, he and the majority Democrat Congress will be expected to deliver the change they have promised. In many instances, this will include stronger government involvement in many areas of our lives, including health care. For example, while many Republicans support a continuation of the current health care system, voters resoundingly responded to Democratic promises of reform and reduced costs for individuals and families.

Yet the political climate for the 111th Congress will be a challenging one for all interest groups in America, including social workers. As soon as President Obama takes office in January 2009, he is expected to sign into law an economic stimulus package of roughly \$850 billion. That money will be allocated and spent before other priorities, such as health care or education, have been fully addressed. This enormous initial expenditure means that not all worthy domestic issues and causes can be fully funded during the next session of Congress.

Another complication is that social workers, already widely regarded as society's safety net in times of crisis, will be counted on to deliver as never before. The United States and its citizens will require our assistance in increasing numbers, and yet the federal, state and local governments will not have the budget dollars required to supply us with needed resources. This will make the many services provided by our nation's social workers more appreciated, and more vital, than ever.

Therefore, while the outcome of the 2008 elections holds promise for our legislative agenda, there are still many hurdles for our profession to overcome. These hurdles will challenge our ability to thrive professionally and our ability to help our clients. NASW will strive to help social workers on both counts.

Agenda

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 111th Congress, we will focus our legislative advocacy in the areas of:

- Social Work Reinvestment Initiative
- Health
- Mental health
- Aging
- Children and families
- Education
- Economic security
- Civil rights
- Military and veterans affairs

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.

Ensuring the supply of social workers meets the increasing demand: Social Work Reinvestment Initiative

The Social Work Reinvestment Initiative will secure federal and state investments in professional social work to meet the increasing public demand for services. With documented shortages of professional social workers in the areas of aging and child welfare, as well as an anticipated need for social work services as the baby boomers continue to age, the supply of professionally-trained social workers is of great importance to governments, families, and to communities.

The initiative, overseen by the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) Coalition, includes a package of legislative proposals at the federal level, as well as, state and territory levels.

During the 111th Congress, NASW, in collaboration with our ANSWER partners, will:

- Reintroduce and work for passage of the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act. The proposed legislation establishes a Social Work Reinvestment Commission to provide long-term recommendations and strategies to maximize the ability of the nation's social workers to serve their clients with expertise and care. Additionally, the proposal provides funding for demonstration programs in the areas of workplace improvements, research, education and training, and community based programs of excellence. We will collaborate with numerous sister social work and allied organizations, as well as thousands of professional social workers across the country in these efforts.
- Work in support of federal legislation that maximizes the ability of our nation's social workers to provide services to clients including:
 - The National Center for Social Work Research Act
 - Strengthen Social Work Training Act
 - Teri Zenner Social Worker Safety Act
 - Various legislation addressing loan forgiveness for social workers and training for child welfare workers
- Implement state and territory plans which focus on issues including:
 - Title protection
 - Loan forgiveness
 - Establishment of social work education programs
 - Education of the public about social workers and how they help
 - Increased salary compensation

Finally, NASW will continue its work to promote public awareness and understanding of the social work profession through public education efforts and collaboration with the Center for Workforce Studies to inform the public and policymakers about the importance of professional social workers services.

Addressing health care for all, physical and behavioral

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 behavioral health services including, but not limited to: behavioral 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.

During the 111th Congress NASW will:

- Support efforts to expand health insurance coverage to the underinsured and uninsured
- Work to protect and expand funding for key federal safety net programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)
- Advocate for the addition of strong health privacy protections in federal law
- Work to close the imbalances related to health disparities among all populations
- Monitor efforts regarding other important issues such as the use and disclosure of confidential medical information, and the maintenance of choice in reproductive health
- 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 clients
- Support the Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) initiatives to study the social work workforce

Addressing the needs of an aging population

The aging population is a major catalyst in the changing landscape of our society. With the aging of the baby boomers and the lengthening of the life span, the number of older Americans is rising rapidly. This leads to an increased need for social work services and competent social workers to provide those services. In addition, there are challenges involved in government's ability to meet the needs of this aging population.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Work with Congress to reintroduce and pass the Caring for an Aging America Act and the Elder Justice Act
- Ensure that provisions within the Older Americans Act are fully funded

Strengthening families

Strengthening families and providing family support are priorities of the social work profession. Social workers understand that the family is the primary socializing agent and economic unit in our culture. Social workers define "family" in the broadest sense to include two or more people who consider themselves "family" and who assume obligations and responsibilities that are generally considered essential to family life. We know that families are the first-line providers of such services as health care, counseling, education, dependent care, long-term care, and income support. When families face challenges in providing these services, there are wide-ranging effects and stress on other societal systems, especially when children are involved. Addressing these needs and challenges significantly affects social workers. Thus, addressing the appropriate role of government in providing support for families, as well as in adopting effective family policy is important to the profession.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- 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)
- Support 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
- Concentrate 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

Educating our nation's youth

The education of our nation's children continues to be a top priority of NASW. Public education is a primary institution that partners with the family in the responsibility for raising and training children and youth. School social workers help schools and communities to address such systemic issues as school dropout, adolescent pregnancy, child abuse, homelessness, juvenile crime, as well as emotional and behavioral problems of some students like substance abuse and suicide. School social workers help struggling students and families overcome a range of challenges that could limit their future success.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Support and advocate for federal legislation such as the “Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act,” that will increase the number of school social workers to serve both students with identified disabilities and students in the general school population

Financing higher education

Higher education in America continues to be critical for both individual success and the economic and political health of our country. While college attendance has grown over the past two decades, state and federal aid has failed to keep pace with the rising cost of higher education. As a result, more social work students than ever must rely on student loans to pay for a four-year degree, thus starting their post-collegiate life with significant debt. We know that recruiting and retaining social workers across disciplines becomes a challenge when they are faced with the combination of mounting college debt and low salaries. To ensure that we have an adequate supply of social workers to meet the needs of children and families, those seeking higher education must be able to afford it.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Support and advocate legislation that will provide funding for training, tuition assistance and loan forgiveness for social workers
- Ensure that Congress fully funds the loan forgiveness provisions in the recently passed Higher Education Act (P.L. 110-315), which provides loan forgiveness for social workers in the practice areas of child welfare, schools, and mental health

Economic security

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 marginalized people and communities. Such federal measures should not include budget policies that arbitrarily cap spending for human needs.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Support proposals that protect the welfare of all Americans, including our most underserved populations, often consisting of women, children, and minorities
- Seek enactment of proposals that engender livable wage opportunities, that require equal pay for equal work, and that restore the American dream through economic stimulus initiatives.

Protecting 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.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Support or oppose federal judicial nominees based on the Association's convictions and the core values of the profession
- Support federal policies, including affirmative action, and those which protect the liberties of distressed populations
- Advocate for proposals that prevent family violence, redress racial profiling, and promote racial harmony
- Support immigration reform proposals that unify families, create pathways to citizenship, and provide meaningful opportunities to attain economic, social, and political equality
- 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 Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act (Hate Crimes)

Supporting members of the military and veterans

Approximately 1,100,000 active duty soldiers have been deployed to Iraq since 2001. They experience physical and mental disruptions with long periods away from home and exceptional emotional circumstances. Estimates top \$650 billion for military health care needs as members of the armed forces struggle with mental and physical disability. Military families also experience various disruptions in their lives, leading to anxiety, stress, and a host of mental health challenges.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there are 23,977,000 veterans in the United States. Due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a once declining population is now on the rise and in need of behavioral health treatment to address issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicidal tendencies. Veterans also make up 25 percent of the people who are homeless, although they comprise only 11 percent of the general population.

During the 111th Congress, NASW will:

- Support the development of a qualified social work workforce prepared to serve active duty military, veterans, and their families to ensure that a high priority is given to human values and social welfare needs
- Advocate for funding for needed services to address the needs of active duty military personnel and veterans and for access to services such as case management, crisis intervention, and housing.
- Work with allied organizations to ensure that the psychosocial needs of this population are being met

About NASW

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the world's largest membership organization of professional social workers, with chapters in every state and US Territory 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 Facts

- NASW has over 145,000 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, advanced 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
- Private practice.

Social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health providers and are often the only providers in medically underserved areas.

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