

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 108TH CONGRESS Second Session: January – December 2004

Background

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the world's largest 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 social and economic justice. 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 is comprised of more than 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, education, aging, family services, child welfare, public welfare, vocational rehabilitation, criminal justice, industry, and as private practitioners. Social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health providers and are often the only providers in medically underserved areas.

Issues

NASW remains concerned about a 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. This year, we will focus our legislative advocacy in the areas of health, mental health, and aging, child welfare, economic security, equity, civil rights, and education. 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.

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 oppose initiatives that would further fragment the health

insurance marketplace. Another high priority for NASW is protection of the integrity, financial stability, and entitlement status of federal programs like Medicaid, Medicare, and SCHIP.

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 mental health care providers, and the right of all individuals to seek and receive professional social work services. Similarly, NASW will support SAMHSA initiatives that improve access to quality care for consumers across the age spectrum and empower clinicians to render the most appropriate clinical care to their patients.

Another of the Association's specific concerns involves working to restore direct Medicare reimbursement to clinical social workers that provide treatment to residents in skilled nursing facilities. 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, bioterrorism preparedness, and the maintenance of choice in reproductive health.

Economic Security

NASW supports a national economic policy that recognizes a nation's well-being is determined not only by financial conditions but also by the well-being of its citizens. Such an economic policy must include universal access to fair and equitable employment, opportunities to accumulate human and financial assets, and access to unstigmatized social and financial support for those in need.

NASW will continue its efforts to improve the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program by increasing support for families with significant barriers to employment, expanding opportunities for higher education and training, eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, and creating a more stable and professional welfare workforce.

NASW also will support proposals to protect and improve the Social Security 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.

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. 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, to prevent family violence and provide support to its victims. In addition, NASW will urge Congress to extend the promise of equal opportunity to all citizens, including gay men, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender persons through the passage of such measures as the Employment Nondiscrimination Act and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Social Work Research and Training

NASW will continue to support passage of the National Center for Social Work Research Act and will work collaboratively with other organizations in the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) Coalition in pursuing this objective.

The Association also will continue to promote the profession's goal of securing national access to programs that support social work research and training. NASW will focus on funding for social

work research and Committee report language regarding social work research programs within appropriate federal agencies.

Child Welfare

NASW will continue to support a strong federal role in, and adequate funding for, child welfare programs, including training programs, and for improvements to 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 their families. Specifically, NASW will focus on legislative proposals to create a well-trained, competent, and stable child welfare workforce and to protect and improve federal child welfare training programs.

Education

NASW supports educational reforms that recognize the diverse needs of students and enhance the opportunity for all students, particularly those with multiple barriers, to meet their highest potential.

During reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), NASW will seek to enhance recognition of the critical role school social workers play in producing effective learners and productive citizens. Specifically, the Association will strive to ensure adequate funding through IDEA and the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling program, in order to expand access to school social work services for all children and youths, including those with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders.

NASW will also focus on protecting the integrity of the Head Start Program and preventing religious discrimination in hiring Head Start teachers and other professionals.

During reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, NASW will promote legislative proposals to provide loan forgiveness and other educational supports for social workers in a variety of practice areas.

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NASW Government Relations and Political Action

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