

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 109TH CONGRESS

January 2005 – December 2006



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 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 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, aging, education, family services, child welfare, public welfare, 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. During the 109th Congress, we will focus our legislative advocacy in the areas of health, mental health, 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 we will 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 the State Children's Health Insurance Program (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 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (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 improve Medicare reimbursement for clinical social workers who 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 that a nation's success 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, in part by increasing support for families with significant barriers to employment, expanding opportunities for higher education and training, and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities.

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.

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. 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).

Social Work Research and Training

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).

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 opportunities for all students, particularly those with multiple barriers, to meet their highest potential.

NASW will continue to support amending the No Child Left Behind Act as changes are proposed to make the bill more fair and effective. The Association will strive to ensure adequate funding for 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 (HEA), NASW will promote legislative proposals to provide loan forgiveness and other educational supports for social workers in a variety of practice areas.

Faith-Based Initiative

NASW maintains that a complementary relationship between public and private resources is necessary to sustain the network of services that is essential to maintain, encourage, develop, and promote family and individual well being. NASW will support legislative initiatives that promote the fundamental principles of social service delivery, including access to services for all, qualified and appropriate staffing, and a separation of church and state. In addition, NASW will remain committed to its position that the faith-based initiative should not create the expectation that private charity will serve as a substitute for public service funding, nor result in a reduction of currently supported programs.

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NASW Government Relations and Political Action

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