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ACTION NETWORK FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (ANSWER)

By Ann Bradford, MSW, senior government relations associate

National Center for Social Work Research Act 2003 (H.R.844/S.73)

The National Center for Social Work Research Center Act authorizes the establishment of a social work research center to support, promote, and disseminate research on the prevention and treatment of critical health and social problems. The House version of the bill, H.R.844, has 42 cosponsors, in addition to Rep. Rodriguez (D-TX-28), the bill's original sponsor. The Senate bill, S.73, has two cosponsors in addition to the bill's original sponsor, Sen. Inouye (D-HI). Both versions of the bill have bipartisan support, which is extremely important in the current political climate. In addition to the five Republicans co-sponsoring H.R.844, Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) is a co-sponsor of S.73.

The ANSWER Coalition was also successful in its efforts to have report language included in the Senate Appropriations Committee's Report on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. As requested by Sen. Inouye (D-HI), the report states:

In support of the AHRQ priority of 'translating research into practice' the Committee recommends that AHRQ work with social work leaders to increase the number of social work researchers undertaking health services research. Social work research addresses health disparities, mental illness and co-occurring disorders, delivery of health and mental health care in community settings and health care for older Americans. The committee encourages dissemination of evidence-based reports to social work health care professionals.

NASW ACTION

NASW joined the other ANSWER Coalition members in lobbying both Republican and Democratic members of Congress to sign on as co-sponsors to the National Center for Social Work Research Act. NASW also lobbied members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committee to include report language in their Labor/Health and Human Services/Education Appropriations Committee Reports regarding social work research.

In September, NASW hosted the ANSWER Coalition Steering Committee members for two days in Washington, D.C. During this time, coalition members visited the offices of their senators and representatives to discuss the bills and to request co-sponsorship. ANSWER also sponsored a lobby day on the Hill during the Society for Social Work Research's (SSWR) annual meeting.

On behalf of ANSWER, NASW hosted individual social work deans and professors in Washington to enable them to meet with their senators and representatives to discuss how the bill would specifically affect their schools and states. NASW also requested that schools of social work highlight the research being done at their schools by writing to their senators and representatives. To enable individuals to send these letters via Congress Web, ANSWER had a representative with a laptop computer present in the NASW exhibit booth at the annual meetings of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and SSWR.

CHILD WELFARE

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)

President Bush signed the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act into law (Public Law 108-36) in June 2003. The new law reauthorizes the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which is the only federal law focused solely on preventing child abuse and improving the child welfare system infrastructure. In addition to reauthorizing basic state grants for system improvements, discretionary grants for research, training, demonstrations, and community-based prevention, the law also reauthorizes

the Adoption Opportunities Act, the Abandoned Infants Assistance Act, and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

A summary of the bill is posted on the child welfare advocacy page on NASW's Web site:
https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/child_welfare.asp

NASW ACTION

NASW partnered with the National Child Abuse Prevention Coalition to develop recommendations and advocate for improvements—many of which were incorporated into the new law. Of particular interest to the social work profession are provisions to improve case management and the training, retention, and supervision of child welfare workers and to enhance collaboration with mental health, health, and juvenile justice agencies.

Child Protective Services Workforce Improvement Act

Rep. Ben Cardin (D-MD-3) introduced the Child Protective Services Improvement Act (H.R. 1534) in April 2003, and Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA-13) introduced the Child Protection Services Workforce Improvement Act (H.R. 2437) in June. Cardin's bill addresses a broad range of system improvements, while Stark's bill focuses on improvements to the child welfare workforce. Other than adding cosponsors, no formal action was taken on the bills during this congressional session. Provisions in the bills will most likely be considered as part of next year's expected action on President Bush's plan to block grant the Title IV-E foster care program (please see below).

More information on the Stark bill, along with a draft letter urging members of Congress to cosponsor the bill, is posted on the child welfare advocacy page of NASW's Web site:
https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/child_welfare.asp

NASW ACTION

NASW has been working with the bills' sponsors to increase support among members of Congress for addressing issues related to the child welfare workforce. NASW also continues to build support for the legislation among other national organizations and coalitions. In September 2003, staff spearheaded a panel discussion on workforce issues for the National Child Welfare, Mental Health, and Juvenile Justice Coalition. In November, staff addressed a meeting on the human services workforce convened by the Alliance for Children and Families.

President Bush Proposal to Block Grant the Title IV-E Foster Care Program

The Bush Administration's proposed budget for FY 2004 included a plan to replace the current entitlement structure of the Title IV-E foster care program with a fixed grant amount. According to the Administration, the goal of its "Foster Care Flexible Funding Proposal" is to focus more federal resources on prevention and reduce the need for expenditures on out-of-home placements. NASW supports more federal resources for prevention, but not by reducing funding for other areas of child welfare. A block grant also would put the current Title IV-E training programs, the majority of which are administered by schools of social work, in serious jeopardy. Introduction of a bill to create a foster care block grant has been delayed until next year.

NASW ACTION

NASW submitted testimony on the Bush Administration's proposal for a June 2003 hearing held by the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources. NASW's testimony focused on the need for a well-trained, competent, stable child welfare workforce to deliver high quality services; the value of social work education in creating such a workforce; and the importance of federal funding, particularly Title IV-E funding, in training social workers and other child welfare staff. NASW submitted similar

testimony to the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, which is in the process of developing recommendations on child welfare financing and court-related improvements.

In addition, NASW is meeting with key members of Congress and the Administration as a follow-up to a letter sent by the association in March highlighting a General Accounting Office that identified the Title IV-E university-agency training partnerships as a promising practice in addressing problems with recruitment and retention. NASW also is working with directors of Title IV-E training programs and members of the Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER) to protect the Title IV-E program. NASW also participated in a meeting in October on “reprofessionalizing” the child welfare workforce convened by the National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD) and the National Public Child Welfare Administrators (NPCWA).

NASW’s congressional testimony, *Fast Facts on the Child Welfare Workforce*, and other information is posted on the child welfare advocacy page on NASW’s Web site:

https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/child_welfare.asp

CIVIL RIGHTS

By Lawrence Moore, III, MPA, senior government relations associate

Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA)

ENDA is a critical piece of civil rights legislation, because it will redress historical labor market discrimination perpetrated against gays and lesbians solely attributed to their sexual orientation. Thus far, in the House, ENDA has not been reintroduced; previously the bill had 193 House cosponsors. However, Sen. Tom Daschle (D-SD) reintroduced ENDA in the Senate on January 7, 2003 (S.16). Currently, S.16 has 27 Senate cosponsors who have expressed interest in combating labor market discrimination.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to diligently pursue enactment of ENDA through progressive coalition efforts with the Human Rights Campaign, the National Urban League, People For the American Way, the AFL-CIO, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. These partnerships have emphasized increasing Senate co-sponsorship, in addition to advocating for ENDA’s reintroduction in the House of Representatives. The Association continues to advocate before the Senate Finance Committee, while also targeting previous House cosponsors and supporters, including the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Women’s Caucus, and moderate Republicans.

Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act (Hate Crimes)

Reintroduced in the House on January 7, 2003 (H.R.80) by Rep. Jackson-Lee (D-TX-18) and in the Senate, on May 1, 2003 (S.966) by Senator Kennedy (D-MA), hate crimes enactment remains one of the principle legislative priorities for NASW. Currently, there are 49 cosponsors in the Senate and one in the House who are committed to alleviating bias-induced violence. In short, the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act would allow the federal government to work with state and local authorities to punish hate crimes to the fullest extent possible, and to expand the definition of a hate crime to include those motivated by disability, gender, or sexual orientation. While NASW believes that states should continue to play the primary role in the prosecution of hate crime violence, a federal law is essential to complement state statutes and to help states prosecute these complicated and expensive cases.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to work with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, People For the American Way, the Human Rights Campaign, and the NAACP to secure passage of the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act. The Association continues to make Congressional visits to House as well as Senate Judiciary Committee Members, with particular focus on moderate Republicans. Further, the Association

has participated in a Congressional letter drop indicating various institutional positions in support of the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act.

ECONOMIC EQUITY

By Lawrence Moore, III, MPA, senior government relations associate

Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2003

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2003 would specifically raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.65 per hour over a two-year period. Wages would increase by \$1.50 in increments of \$0.75 per year. Rep. George Miller (D-CA-7) reintroduced the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2003 in the House (H.R.965) on February 7, 2003. Sens. Daschle (D-SD) and Kennedy (D-MA) reintroduced the bill (S.224) in the Senate on January 28, 2003. Currently, there are 100 House and 37 Senate cosponsors. NASW believes that The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2003 will appreciably affect the quality of life for women, children, minorities, and families across this great nation by providing meaningful wages that offset poverty levels.

NASW ACTION

NASW is working with the Campaign For a Fair Minimum Wage, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, AFL-CIO, the American Psychological Association, and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops to secure passage of this initiative. Thus far, advocacy visits have been made, specifically focusing upon the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections and Senate Republicans, including Alexander (R-TN), Allard (R-CO), Allen (R-VA), Ballenger (R-NC-10) Biggert (R-IL-13) Bond (R-MO), Burns (R-MT), Campbell (R-CO), Chafee (R-RI), Coleman (R-MN), Collins (R-ME), DeWine (R-OH), Fitzgerald (R-IL), Frist (R-TN), Hoekstra (R-MI-2), Kline (R-MN-2) Norwood (R-GA-9), and Snowe (R-ME). Moreover, the Association continues to work with Senator Kennedy's (D-MA) legislative staff concerning political and coalition strategy.

Fair Pay Act

Introduced in both the House and Senate on April 9, 2003, by Rep. Holmes-Norton (D-DC) and by Sen. Harkin (D-IA), the Fair Pay Act (H.R.1695/S.841) attempts to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 through the elimination of sex and race discrimination in the wage-setting system. Most women and minorities are disproportionately segregated into a small number of jobs such as clerical, service workers, nurses, social service providers, and teachers. Historically, these positions have been devalued and underpaid because of the gender and race of their occupants. NASW believes that The Fair Pay Act would expand the protections of The Equal Pay Act by safeguarding women and minorities against wage discrimination in equivalent jobs with similar skills and responsibilities. Currently, there are 19 House and one Senate cosponsors.

NASW ACTION

Legislative strategy consists of working with the foremost coalition on gender equity concerns, the National Committee on Pay Equity. NASW's advocacy efforts continue to focus on moderate Republicans and Democrats who serve on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce as well as Republican Senators on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. In addition, NASW will be collaborating with The National Committee on Pay Equity and other gender-based entities on the implementation of a Congressional advocacy day consisting of civil rights, labor, and religious partners who steadfastly endorse pay equity.

EDUCATION

By Ann Bradford, MSW, senior government relations associate

Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP)

The Omnibus Bill, which includes funding for programs within the Department of Education, funds the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program at \$33.8 million, an increase over the FY03

funding level of \$32.5 million. This bill has been passed by the House of Representatives, but is still waiting final passage by the Senate in January 2004. The Senate is expected to maintain the funding amount passed by the House. After which time President Bush is expected to sign it into law.

NASW ACTION

As a strong proponent of the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program, NASW partnered with the School Social Work Association of America, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of School Psychologists to lobby for increased funding for the program in the FY04 budget.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The House of Representatives passed H.R. 1350, which reauthorizes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, in April 2003. In the Senate, S. 1248, a bipartisan reauthorization bill, has passed the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, but has not yet been placed on the Senate Floor calendar for consideration. It is expected that this will occur in early 2004.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to partner with the member organizations of the National Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations (NAPSO) and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) to advocate for improvements in the IDEA reauthorization bill. This was done through office visits, sign-on letters, and the distribution of legislative principles and language drafted by NAPSO and CCD.

FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE

By Ann Bradford, MSW, senior government relations associate

Charitable Giving Act (H.R.7) and the CARE Act of 2003 (S.476)

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have passed their versions of the faith-based initiative bill this year (H.R.7/S.476). The two bills are similar in that they are very scaled down versions of President Bush's faith-based initiative. In essence, they are tax bills. However, the Senate bill includes funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) while the House bill does not. At the end of 2003, the House and Senate were preparing to go to conference to devise a compromise bill, however, a pre-conference agreement, between Sen. Santorum (R-PA) (the bill's sponsor) and Senate Democrats, regarding the bill could not be reached. Therefore, the process of drafting a compromise bill, whether through a conference committee or by sending the bill back and forth between the two chambers, has been postponed until 2004.

Neither the House nor the Senate bill includes language that would protect faith-based organizations that receive federal funds from anti-discrimination hiring laws. However, President Bush and the Congressional supporters of the faith-based initiative are not overly concerned about the exclusion of this language, since the President has signed an Executive Order that offers this protection through federal regulations. Future presidents can reverse Executive Orders.

NASW ACTION

NASW joined with the Citizens Against Religious Discrimination Coalition to express concerns to members of Congress and the Administration regarding discrimination in hiring practices and in service delivery. NASW also partnered with the Social Services Block Grant Coalition in an attempt to have SSBG funding included in the final version of the faith-based initiative bill.

In addition, NASW has voiced concern about the House passed version of the Head Start reauthorization bill that allows for religious discrimination in the hiring of teachers and in the use of parent volunteers. The Senate bill, which has been voted out of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee but not yet considered by the full Senate, does not include this discriminatory language.

FIELD ORGANIZING

By Dina L. Zarrella, MSS, MLSP, senior field organizer

Grassroots Advocacy

NASW has upgraded Congress Plus software to include a grassroots management function. This allows staff to share grassroots contacts in a central location and match NASW members with their Congressional delegation to simplify lobbying for key issues.

NASW staffed lobby visits in January, April, June, July, and September to promote the National Center for Social Work Research Act. Through these lobby days, 19 social work educators and researchers met with 28 members of Congress or their staff. On October 9, NASW co-sponsored the Third Biennial Social Work Policy Practice Forum, which brought 403 social work students and educators to Washington, DC, to learn about public policy and meet with members of Congress.

In 2003, 1,748 individuals sent 9,379 letters and or e-mails through Congress Web. The areas that generated the greatest response are listed below.

Topic Area	Number of Letters /E-mails
Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers in Child Welfare	1,343
Mental Health Parity	918
Welfare (Reauthorization & Disabilities)	855
Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act of 2003	817
Medicare Prescription Drug Issues	729
Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers & Other Public Service Employees	726
Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program	556
National Center for Social Work Research Act	544
NASW Iraq Position	424
Child Welfare (CAPTA & Workforce)	395
Medicaid – state fiscal relief	299
Small Business Health Fairness Act	271
IDEA	249
Uninsured	224

In November, NASW staff implemented targeted outreach to seven chapters to stop passage the Medicare prescription drug conference report. Unfortunately, the conference report passed despite our efforts.

To increase Republican co-sponsorship of the Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act, staff are coordinating lobbying efforts with twelve chapters with moderate Republicans on key committees.

Legislative Advocacy Network

In 2003, the Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv was changed from an interactive to non-interactive listserv. The new listserv was re-launched in August 2003.

As of December 2003, 575 individuals are subscribed to the Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv. NASW staff have promoted the network through postings to Specialty Sections, meetings school groups, affiliated associations, NASW News and the Web site.

The issue areas covered by the listserv include mental health, health, civil rights, child welfare, loan forgiveness, social work research, education, economic equity, social service funding, and faith-based initiatives. All NASW members are encouraged to join the [Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv](http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/networknew.asp) <http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/networknew.asp> to stay abreast of federal legislative activities that pertain to social workers and their clients.

Web Site Development

Staff revamped the Grassroots section of the Web site to include a tool kit and direct links to Congress Web. Biographies of the democratic candidates for President have been posted to the PACE section of the Web site. Loan Forgiveness has a dedicated section on the Issues page.

Twenty-two action alerts and thirty-three updates have been posted to the Web site in this year. These action alerts are also sent directly to Chapter Presidents, Chapter Executive Directors, and the Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Association Health Plans (AHP)

By Enzo Pastore, MSS, MLSP, senior government relations associate

Association Health Plans (AHPs) permit small businesses to link through trade and professional associations to collectively purchase health benefits at lower rates than they are typically offered individually. Current law requires AHPs to be regulated under both federal and state law. The Small Business Fairness Act would exempt AHPs from state laws, including consumer protections, mandated benefit laws, and other safeguards thus, significantly increasing the risk for fraud and abuse.

The House version, H.R.660, passed the floor in June, largely along a partisan vote. The Senate will likely consider the Small Business Health Fairness Act (S.545) in 2004. NASW opposes H.R.660/S.545, because it would exempt AHPs from state laws and regulations, eviscerating existing consumer protections and increasing health insurance costs for those employee groups left out of the new plans.

NASW ACTION

NASW has taken a number of steps to defeat this legislation. It has been very active in a coalition opposed to the measure and has lobbied in opposition. Our lobbying efforts have entailed the release of action alerts asking our grassroots membership to express their opposition, contacts with congressional staff, and letters of opposition to both House and Senate offices. In 2004 we will continue to monitor the movement of S. 545 and take necessary steps to oppose its passage.

Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act (CSWMEA)

By James K. Finley, MPA, senior government relations associate

Because of a provision in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, clinical social workers in some areas of the country may no longer bill Medicare Part B directly for psychotherapy services to clients residing in a skilled nursing facility. The situation is further complicated by the severely inadequate national policy on the provision of mental health services under Medicare. Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Reps. Fortney "Pete" Stark (D-CA-13) and James Leach (R-IA-2) introduced the Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act of 2003 (S.343/H.R.707), to address this issue.

NASW ACTION

The Association has been working with key senators and representatives to address this problem and has secured introduction of this legislative remedy. Although this legislation was not passed in the 107th Congress, NASW continues to work with key senators and representatives on this issue in the 108th Congress. Currently, NASW is building up grassroots membership support for the measure in target states and congressional districts.

Keeping Our Families Together Act

By James K. Finley, MPA, senior government relations associate

Introduced on October 2, 2003, the Keeping Families Together Act (S.1704/H.R.3243) authorizes competitive grants for states to establish systems of individualized mental health treatment and family support services for children who are in custody or in danger of entering the custody of the state for the purpose of receiving mental health services. Eligible states would have laws or policies in effect that ensure that children receive appropriate mental health services so that parents do not have to relinquish legal custody of children to obtain needed care. The program would assist states in establishing infrastructure for interagency cooperation and cross system financing and expanding public health insurance programs to cover these services after the grant expires.

NASW ACTION

This bipartisan legislation enjoys broad support from across the political spectrum and NASW has been vigorously lobbying for its support in recent weeks. Working with a broad coalition of mental health and family support organizations, NASW has made numerous calls to Hill offices in support of the bill.

Medicaid Reform

By Enzo Pastore, MSS, MLSP, senior government relations associate

In January of this year, the Bush Administration offered states temporary fiscal relief, but only on the condition that they accept the conversion of Medicaid into a block grant program. The Administration's highly touted proposal was played out in meetings of a National Governors Association bi-partisan task force. The 10 governors attempted to arrive at recommendations on how to implement this drastic structural change in the Medicaid program.

When the task force disbanded in June without reaching any agreement, the Administration's proposal lost its momentum. Instead, Congress did provide some fiscal relief to the states by authorizing a \$20 billion two-year increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). Whether any efforts to initiate major structural reform in 2004 occur will depend on several factors, not the least of which is the impact that the Medicare prescription drug law will have on Medicaid. At this point, although the new Medicare law transfers drug coverage for the dual eligibles to Medicare, another provision of the law will require the states to pay much of its savings back to the federal government.

However, as the Medicare law does not take effect until 2006, it will be some time before the Medicaid program will feel its effects. It is highly unlikely that Congress will approve any temporary fiscal relief measure for the states in 2004.

One recent development worth noting is that a Senate Republican Task Force on health has been appointed. Whether this task force will examine changes to the Medicaid program remains to be seen.

NASW ACTION

NASW was successful in its efforts with other organizations and coalitions to enact the FMAP increase this year. NASW will continue to closely monitor activities and developments regarding any proposed changes to the Medicaid program. We will also continue to work closely with a national coalition of health care and disability advocates to vigorously oppose any attempt to block grant or cap federal Medicaid funding.

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage

By Enzo Pastore, MSS, MLSP, senior government relations associate

In the week before Thanksgiving, both the House and Senate passed the conference report of H.R. 1/S. 1. President Bush has subsequently signed the bill into law. In the House, the process that culminated in the

“longest roll call in House history” evoked several bitter partisan controversies, but in the end, the bill passed.

The key provisions of the new Medicare law, which will cost roughly \$400 billion over 10 years, are:

- The availability of a prescription drug discount card for Medicare recipients in April 2004
- A prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries in 2006
- Subsidies valued at \$70 billion for employers that continue to provide prescription drug coverage to retirees
- More federal funds to rural Medicare providers
- Medicare drug coverage for dually eligible individuals (eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare)
- Establishment of tax-preferred health savings accounts for individuals
- A pilot program beginning in 2010 in six metropolitan areas in which fee-for-service Medicare would compete with private health plans
- Private health plans to receive \$12 billion in subsidies as an incentive to participate in Medicare
- Means testing of benefits

NASW ACTION

Regrettably, other than Medicare coverage for the dual eligibles, there is precious little in the legislation that meets NASW’s six core principles for a comprehensive and affordable drug benefit. However, legislation has already been introduced that would attempt to repeal some of the more objectionable provisions of the law. Those being the prohibition on the Federal government to negotiate for lower drug prices and a repeal of the pilot project establishing direct competition between Medicare and private health plans.

In 2004, NASW will continue to closely monitor developments for the regulation and implementation of the law’s provisions. Through action alerts, letters to Congress, meetings with key members of Congress and staff, and collective grassroots efforts with other advocacy organizations and coalitions, NASW will forcefully support efforts to change or repeal those provisions that are detrimental to providing affordable coverage to beneficiaries and weaken the integrity and future of the Medicare program.

Mental Health Parity

By James K. Finley, MPA, senior government relations associate

The fight for mental health parity was dealt a blow with the death of one of its primary proponents, U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, late in 2002. Consequently, there has been less movement of mental health parity in 2003; however, NASW and its coalition partners continued to support passage throughout the year. Senate Republican leadership have assured lead Senate sponsors, Sens. Domenici (R-NM) and Kennedy (D-MA), that they will take up the bill early in 2004. HELP Committee Chair Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH) plans to move a modified bill quickly through committee and onto the floor by next spring. In the House, Speaker Hastert (R-IL-14) has recently expressed great reluctance to move the bill forward. In response, Senate leaders are working on revised bill language that would be less sweeping and less prescriptive than the current text of the current Wellstone Act.

NASW ACTION

In conjunction with the Mental Health Liaison Group, a coalition of provider and consumer mental health advocacy groups, NASW has strived for passage of full mental and behavioral health parity. In 2003, NASW continued to push hard for passage of the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Parity Act (S.486/H.R.953). Throughout the year, the Association has released several action alerts and background briefings to the membership for grassroots action and support. Advocacy activity is expected to again increase in support of Senate movement of the legislation.

The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health

By James K. Finley, senior government relations associate

On April 29, 2002, President Bush issued an Executive Order creating the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. The Commission was created to examine the U.S. mental health service delivery system, both public and private, and to advise the President on potential improvements. Its goal is to lay the groundwork necessary for adults with serious mental illness and children with severe emotional disturbances to be full living, working, and learning participants in their communities. In July 2003, the Commission issued its final report, which described existing barriers to the delivery of effective mental health care, provided examples of successful community-based models, and made a large number of recommendations for transforming the delivery system.

NASW ACTION

NASW advised the Commission through testimony and other expert communications as it prepared its recommendations and final report. The Association has incorporated a number of the Commission's key recommendations into its lobbying strategy and materials on priority legislation including children's issues, Medicaid, and workforce training. These recommendations will be used extensively in 2004 to justify policy recommendations supported by NASW. The Association also attending a recent Rosalyn Carter symposium on implementation steps of the plan and is making recommendations to SAMHSA on its implementation action steps.

LOAN FORGIVENESS

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Child Protective Services Student Loan Forgiveness Act

College Opportunity for a Better America Act

Sen. Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH-11) introduced the Child Protective Services Student Loan Forgiveness Act (S. 409/H.R. 734) in February 2003. Rep. George Miller (D-CA-7) introduced the College Opportunity for a Better America Act (H.R. 1306) in March. The DeWine-Jones bill would provide loan forgiveness for students who obtain a BSW or MSW and work in child welfare. The Miller bill would provide loan forgiveness for a broader range of public service employees, including child welfare workers with social work or related degrees; math, science, bilingual and special education teachers in low-income communities; early childhood educators; nurses; dietitians; specialists working with infant and toddlers with disabilities; and others who work in a public service profession that suffers from a critical lack of qualified personnel and serves a low-income or needy community. The loan forgiveness bills are expected to be considered during debate on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) next year.

More information, including a summary of the DeWine-Jones bill, draft letters to members of Congress urging cosponsorship, and the *Need for Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers . . . in Their Own Words*, is posted on the loan forgiveness advocacy page of NASW's Web site:

https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/child_welfare.asp

NASW ACTION

In preparation for action next year, NASW is working to increase the number of cosponsors for both loan forgiveness bills. The association also is advocating for loan forgiveness for school social workers and those in other practice areas and is collecting data on loan indebtedness of social work students.

POLITICAL ACTION FOR CANDIDATE ELECTION (PACE)

By Vered Uziel, MSW, MPA, senior political affairs associate

Annual Leadership Meeting Training

Twenty-three chapter PACE chairs participated in an all-day training on Saturday, August 2, during NASW's Annual Leadership Meeting (ALM). This is the second time that PACE has sponsored a chapter-training event at ALM. NASW-PACE prefers to hold these events in the off year of an election cycle, so that chapter PACE committees can make maximum preparations for membership participation in federal and state elections.

Training began with an overview of PACE. Training gave information about working within NASW, running effective committee meetings, making political endorsements and contributions, working with campaigns and coalitions, and involving NASW members in electoral activities. Since 2004 is also a presidential election year, there was a lively discussion of how the Association conducts candidate preference polls amongst its members and what processes it follows to endorse a presidential candidate.

Resource Materials for Chapters

Over the past year, staff developed several new PACE chapter resources: a Chapter PACE operating manual, a PACE Tip Sheet and a Chapter Legislative Operations Manual. These resources were designed to help chapters initiate, strengthen, and improve their political action and government relations activities. They were distributed to PACE chairs during the PACE Training at ALM and can be found on the PACE page of NASW's Web site.

Staffing Changes

On September 17, 2003, Vered Uziel joined NASW as Senior Political Affairs Associate, filling the position that Katherine Levy vacated in May. Ms. Uziel comes to NASW from Peter D. Hart Research and Associates, a Democratic polling and political consulting firm. She holds master's degrees in both social work and public administration from Columbia University in New York.

Field Organizers

PACE will again place field organizers in eight chapters from mid July to mid November during the 2004 federal elections—a practice that was initiated in 1996. Thirty-four chapters, in states with a U.S. Senate race, were eligible to apply for a field organizer by December 1, 2003. National PACE received applications from fifteen chapters. Staff is in the process of reviewing the application information and will inform chapters of their selection in February 2004.

Congressional Endorsements and Contributions, 2004 Primary

The national PACE Board of Trustees met at the end of November in Washington, DC for their annual day and a half meeting. During this meeting, the Trustees authorized primary endorsements and contributions totaling \$53,500 to 16 senate incumbents and one challenger, including one social worker, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD); and \$29,000 to 27 house incumbents, including four incumbent social workers: Barbara Lee (D-CA-09), Susan Davis (D-CA-53), Ed Towns (D-NY-10), and Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX-28). Prior to this meeting the Trustees authorized endorsements and contributions to eight senate incumbents, four house incumbents and one house challenger, social worker Allyson Schwartz. Amounts authorized were \$16,000 and \$13,000, respectively.

The Board of Trustees also authorized the expenditure of \$30,000 to Democratic and Republican Donor councils (\$15,000 to each). Donor Councils are groups that, in exchange for a contribution, provide access to members of Congress or a political party through meetings, issue briefings, and other events. In addition, the Board authorized an expenditure of \$5,000 each for the national Democratic and Republican

political parties so that government relations and political action staff can attend political party events during calendar year 2004.

Another Social Worker Runs for Congress

Allyson Schwartz, a viable social work candidate, is running for an open swing seat in Pennsylvania's 13th Congressional District, which is a suburb of Philadelphia. Ms. Schwartz has been in the Pennsylvania state senate since 1990 where she emerged as a leader on education, health care, and reproductive choice; she previously sought a statewide office and almost won the Democratic nomination for that post. She is an excellent fundraiser and has been endorsed by Emily's List.

Democratic Presidential Candidates' Biographies

PACE posted brief biographies of the 2004 Democratic presidential candidates on NASW's Web site. These biographies highlight candidates' social welfare policy proposals on some issue areas of importance to social workers. In addition, they contain information about the candidates' personal and professional backgrounds.

Presidential Endorsement Process

During their October 2, 2003 meeting, NASW's Board of Directors approved the PACE Trustees' proposal of the process the Association will follow if it wishes to endorse a presidential candidate in the 2004 election. PACE informed chapters of the newly approved endorsement process and encouraged them to poll their general membership to determine if there is majority preference for a particular candidate. National PACE has also provided an opportunity for Chapter Boards of Directors to express their preference for a particular presidential candidate by March 15, 2004.

SOCIAL SERVICES BLOCK GRANT (SSBG)

By Ann Bradford, MSW, senior government relations associate

The Omnibus Bill, which includes funding for programs within the Department of Health and Human Services, includes \$1.7 Billion for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) for FY04. SSBG is a flexible block grant addressing the needs of children and families, the elderly, and vulnerable adults. It enables them to avoid more expensive government assistance by helping them in their efforts to remain in the community in the most independent setting possible.

The House of Representatives has passed the Omnibus Bill, however, the Senate has yet to vote on it. It is expected that this vote will take place in early 2004. In addition, S.476, the CARE Act of 2003 (faith-based initiative), provides \$1.375 Billion in new funding for SSBG for FY03 and FY04. However, the companion bill in the House, H.R.7, does not include the additional funding. This difference in the two bills has become a major obstacle in drafting a compromise bill.

NASW ACTION

NASW partnered with other organizations from the Social Services Block Grant Coalition to lobby for increased funds for the Social Services Block Grant through the appropriations process. In addition, NASW and other organizations have lobbied for SSBG funds to be included in the CARE Act of 2003 (S.476) and the Charitable Giving Act (H.R.7). The lobbying effort included engaging NASW's grassroots network in a letter writing campaign to their members of Congress.

WELFARE

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

The latest extension of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) runs through March 2004. Like last year, Congress made progress on a reauthorization bill this year, but was unable to find the time or consensus to complete its work. The House passed its

version, the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R. 4) in February 2003. The Senate Finance Committee did not approve its version, the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) Act, until September. Senate floor action is expected early next year.

NASW ACTION

NASW submitted testimony for a welfare hearing held by the Senate Finance Committee in March 2003. The testimony focused on the association's top three priorities: improving services to families with disabilities and other barriers to employment; reducing disparate treatment of racial and ethnic minorities; and making improvements in the welfare workforce.

NASW continues to meet with key Senators in an effort to make additional improvements to the PRIDE Act before it makes its way to the Senate floor. Specifically, NASW is working to extend the time participation in "rehabilitative services" can count as work beyond six months. The extension is included in a bill, Pathways to Independence Act (S. 1523), introduced with NASW's assistance in late July by Sens. Gordon Smith (R-OR), Jim Jeffords (I-VT), and Kent Conrad (D-ND). NASW is also continuing to build support for improving the welfare workforce, eliminating discriminatory practices, increasing educational opportunities, increasing child care funding, providing funding for transitional jobs, and restoring benefit eligibility for immigrants. NASW is opposing the superwaiver provision, the increase in work hours and participation rates, and funding for marriage promotion activities.

NASW continues to provide leadership in several national welfare coalitions—Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) TANF Task Force, Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) Poverty Reduction Working Group, and the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights (LCCR) Welfare Task Force.

More information on welfare reauthorization, including NASW's testimony and a draft letter urging Senators to cosponsor S. 1523, is posted on the welfare reauthorization advocacy page on NASW's Web site: <https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/welfare/legislation/default.asp>