



OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND POLITICAL ACTION
QUARTERLY REPORT

APRIL-JUNE 2005

109TH CONGRESS

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ACTION NETWORK FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (ANSWER)

By Ann Bradford Vaughan, MSW, senior government relations associate

Senator Inouye (D-HI) reintroduced the National Center for Social Work Research Act (S.90) in January. This bill 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 bill language of S.90 is identical to the language of the bill introduced last year.

In addition to advocating for the support and passage of S.90, the ANSWER Coalition continues to place a high priority on legislative issues in the following areas: loan forgiveness for social workers, health professions training, increasing federal funding for child welfare training programs, and increasing social work-related research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

A summary of the ANSWER Coalition's activities is posted on the ANSWER issue page on the NASW Web site: <https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/answer/legislation/default.asp>

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to advocate for the passage of S.90 and to work with the other ANSWER Coalition members in lobbying Republican Members of Congress to sign on as co-sponsors to the National Center for Social Work Research Act. Gaining the support of Democrats for this bill will not be difficult; however, NASW is attempting to obtain the support of Republicans first so the bill is not viewed as a partisan one.

NASW is currently seeking a Republican member in the House of Representatives to introduce a companion bill to S.90. It is important that the bill have bipartisan support in the House since the current political atmosphere makes it very difficult for a bill introduced by a Democrat to move forward.

In an effort to promote loan forgiveness for social workers and health professions training, increase federal funding for child welfare training programs, and increase social work-related research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the ANSWER Coalition has submitted report language to Sen. Specter (R-PA), Sen. Mikulski (D-MD), and Sen. Inouye (D-HI), members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, for inclusion in the Committee Report on the Labor, Health, and Human Services, and the Education Appropriations bill. It is expected that the Appropriations Committee will consider this bill during the summer.

CHILD WELFARE

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program

On June 9, 2005, Rep. Wally Herger (R-CA), chair of the Human Resources Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee, held another hearing on child welfare financing. The hearing focused on the President's proposed "Child Welfare Program Option" and a new report developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The report is available on the HHS Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/fc-financing-ib/>

Democratic members of the subcommittee challenged the Bush Administration's witness, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families Wade Horn, to provide legislative language on the President's proposal. In response, Dr. Horn offered to discuss the proposal at length with any member who was interested. Although there is still no legislative language, summaries of the President's plan make it clear that the Title IV-E training program and its agency-university partnerships would be jeopardized by the elimination of the program's entitlement funding and its enhanced 75 percent federal matching rate.

As of June 30, 2005, no legislation to implement the President's plan had been introduced in either the House or Senate. However, separate legislation is not needed for Congress to make significant changes to how Title IV-E is funded. Funding changes can be, and often are, made through the budget reconciliation process.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to educate Members of Congress about the value of the Title IV-E training program and the dangers a block grant poses not only to the program, but also to abused and neglected children. The Association also continues to support the advocacy activities of social work educators. For example, NASW is providing information and logistical support to deans and directors in New York State who are promoting IV-E training through meetings with their congressional delegation both in New York and Washington, DC.

In addition, NASW, along with other national child welfare organizations, continues its work with the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), National Governors Association (NGA), and National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to develop alternatives to the Bush proposal and coordinate a strategy for retaining entitlement funding and the enhanced federal match for IV-E training.

Advocacy materials for the Title IV-E training program are posted on the child welfare advocacy page on NASW's Web site: https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/child_welfare.asp

Child Welfare Appropriations-CAPTA & Title IV-B Child Welfare Training

Last year, for the first time in 10 years, Congress approved increases in funding for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), although the increases were significantly smaller than those proposed by President Bush in his FY 2005 budget. This year, however, the President failed to propose any increases and the House followed the President's lead when it approved the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill (HR 3010) on June 24, 2005. The bill provides basically level funding for all CAPTA programs: Title I-State Grants: \$27.3 million; Title II-Community-based Programs: \$43 million; Title III-Research & Demonstration Programs: \$32 million.

The bill also maintains level funding of \$7.4 million for the Title IV-B child welfare training program. Report language for the IV-B training program includes recognition of "the need for trained, skilled, and qualified child welfare service workers" and explains that the program "provides grants to institutions of higher education to develop and improve education and training programs and resources for child welfare service providers as well as students seeking degrees in social work."

Additional report language accompanying funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) applauds the work of the NIH Child Abuse and Neglect Working Group and calls on the group to continue its collaboration across institutes and agencies to identify and address needed research and professional development in the area of child maltreatment, specifically in the area of treatment interventions.

NASW ACTION

NASW, as part of the National Child Abuse Coalition, continues its advocacy to increase CAPTA funding for Titles I and II to the levels proposed by the President last year (\$42 million and \$65 million, respectively) and to increase funding for research to the authorized level of \$35 million. NASW, in collaboration with the Coalition, was instrumental in creating the child abuse working group and in securing the NIH report language in the bill.

CIVIL RIGHTS

By Lawrence Moore, III, 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 because of their sexual orientation. ENDA was not reintroduced in the House during the 108th Congress, but was reintroduced in the Senate on January 7, 2003 in the 108th Congress. At that time, ENDA had 27 Senate co-sponsors. NASW anticipates that ENDA will be reintroduced in the Senate in the next few months.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to diligently pursue introduction and 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 advocate for reintroduction in the Senate and House of Representatives. The Association continues to target previous Senate and House co-sponsors and supporters, including the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Women's Caucus, and the Moderate Republicans. Past alerts and updates can be found on NASW's Web site:

http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/civil_rights.asp

Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act

Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) introduced the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act of 2005 (H.R.2662/ S.1145) on May 26, 2005. Currently, 131 in the House and 44 in the Senate 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. Although NASW believes that states should continue to play a primary role in the prosecution of hate crime violence, 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 and Senate Judiciary Committee members, with particular focus on moderate Republicans. Past alerts and updates can be found on NASW's Web site: http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/civil_rights.asp

ECONOMIC EQUITY

By Lawrence Moore, III, senior government relations associate

The Fair Minimum Wage Act

The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2005 would increase the minimum wage to \$7.25 in three steps starting at \$5.85 60 days after enactment to \$6.55 one year later, and ultimately, to \$7.25 one year after that period. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) introduced the legislation (S.1062) in the Senate on May 18, 2005 and Rep. George Miller (D-CA) sponsored the companion legislation in the House (H.R.2429). Currently, 31 co-sponsors in the Senate and 100 in the House support a wage enhancement for American workers. The Association believes that the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2005 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 introduction and passage of this initiative. The Association continues to work with Sen. Kennedy's (D-MA) legislative staff on a political and coalition strategy, in addition to lobbying Senate and House members who have significant influence over this measure. Past alerts and updates can be found on NASW's Web site:

http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/civil_rights.asp

The Fair Pay Act

Introduced in both the House and Senate on April 19, 2005 by Rep. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC) and Sen. Thomas Harkin (D-IA), the Fair Pay Act (H.R.1697/ S.840) attempts to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 by eliminating 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 their occupants' gender or race. 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 to predominantly white male jobs. Currently, 100 co-sponsors in the House and 31 in the Senate believe in eliminating the wage disparity endured by women and minorities.

NASW ACTION

NASW's 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 on Republican senators on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Past alerts and updates can be found on NASW's Web site: http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/civil_rights

EDUCATION

By Ann Bradford Vaughan, MSW, senior government relations associate

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in late 2004. The Department of Education is now drafting the federal regulations that will provide guidance to schools about how to implement the new law. A draft of the regulations will be made public in June. The Department will conduct a series of meetings across the country in June and July where individuals can submit written and verbal comments on the proposed regulations.

NASW ACTION

NASW sent an announcement to its members alerting them that individuals could submit written comments, as well as make verbal statements, at the meetings being hosted by the Department this summer. Comments on the proposed regulations were submitted by NASW earlier this year.

Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program

The President's FY06 budget request eliminates the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP), which was reauthorized in the No Child Left Behind Act. ESSCP, formerly known as the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Program, is a discretionary program that provides grants to school districts to establish or expand comprehensive counseling programs and mental health services through qualified school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors. The House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education voted on its version of the bill,

which funds ESSCP, on June 9. It is expected that the Senate subcommittee will consider its version of the bill later this summer.

A summary of the ESSCP is posted on the education issues page on NASW's Web site:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/education.asp>

NASW ACTION

NASW strongly supports the inclusion of funding for ESSCP in the FY06 budget. Therefore, NASW continues to partner with the School Social Work Association of America, American Counseling Association, American School Counselor Association, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association for College Admission Counseling, American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to lobby for the inclusion of this program in the final budget. In addition to conducting Hill visits and sending letters of support to the Hill, NASW continues to use legislative alerts to encourage members to contact their Congressional representatives through phone calls and letters sent through Congress Web.

Although there appears to be support for the program, especially in the Senate, the majority of the offices visited have reminded NASW of how tight the budget is this year and that it will be a tough fight to keep the program intact. Department of Education staff members also say that it will be hard to keep this program in the budget because they think there is enough money in IDEA for counseling services. Unfortunately, the schools feel that IDEA is already underfunded.

Head Start

The House Education and the Workforce Committee passed a bipartisan Head Start reauthorization bill in May. However, Chairman Boehner (R-OH) plans to offer an amendment to the bill when it is considered by the full House that would roll back civil rights protections that are in the current program. If passed, the amendment would allow Head Start programs that are run by faith-based organizations to discriminate when hiring. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee held a hearing on its reauthorization bill in late May.

NASW ACTION

NASW has been working closely with the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination (CARD) in an effort to defeat any attempt to include language that would roll back current civil rights protections in Head Start. In addition to visiting with Members of Congress with other CARD members, NASW sent out an action alert to notify members of this proposed amendment.

FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE

By Ann Bradford Vaughan, MSW, senior government relations associate

The Administration is continuing in its quest to expand charitable choice laws to additional federal programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Head Start. When the Senate considers the TANF reauthorization, it is expected that Sen. Santorum (R-PA) will offer an amendment that would expand charitable choice laws to all programs funded by the Social Services Block Grant. If this amendment passes, it will have the potential to undermine local civil rights laws regarding hiring practices. In the House, Rep. Boehner (R-OH) has indicated that he plans to offer an amendment to the bipartisan Head Start bill that would enable Head Start programs run by faith-based organizations to discriminate when hiring.

Additional information can be found on the faith-based initiatives issue page on the NASW Web site:

<http://www.naswdc.org/advocacy/issues/faith.asp>

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to partner with the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination (CARD) in expressing concerns to members of Congress and the Administration regarding discrimination in hiring practices by faith-based organizations and in service delivery. NASW plans to oppose Sen. Santorum's and Rep. Boehner's amendments if they are offered. NASW has voiced these concerns through Hill visits, organizational sign-on letters, and by activating the NASW membership through legislative action alerts.

HEALTH

By Elizabeth Marrero, MSW, senior government relations associate

Advanced Directives Legislation

The Association has been working with the offices of Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) on the Advance Directives Improvement and Education Act of 2005 (S.347/H.R.2058), in which Medicare recipients can consult with their physician on end-of-life and advance care planning issues to become informed about potential decisions a person or a person's family member may face in life-threatening situations. This legislation would allow physicians to be reimbursed for a medical visit to discuss end-of-life care issues with patients and family members.

NASW supports this bipartisan bill as an important tool for all Americans to consider, communicate, and document their advance care planning wishes in regard to end-of-life situations and quality of life indicators for devastating illness or injury, from which there is little or no hope of recovery. The bill has been passed by the Senate and is waiting to be heard in the House.

NASW ACTION

NASW has been working closely with staff from the offices of Sen. Nelson and Rep. Levin to increase support, especially in the House. Co-sponsors are still on the House bill and NASW staff continues to visit Members of Congress. Two NASW alerts to members have been sent and letters of support have been sent to the House Subcommittee on Health.

Patient Navigator Act

On April 27, 2005, the Patient Navigator Act 2005 (H.R.1812/ S.898), sponsored by Rep. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), passed the House and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. This legislation would establish a "patient navigator" system through Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), National Cancer Institute, and the Indian Health Service. Under the system, patient navigators would help uninsured patients evaluate their treatment options, as well as help them obtain referrals, find clinical trials, and apply for financial assistance. The legislation would authorize \$25 million in grants over five years to establish patient navigator programs in low-income and rural communities nationwide.

NASW ACTION

NASW was able to secure language in the both the House and Senate committee reports that would strongly recommend that these navigators be supervised and have oversight by licensed professionals. We also requested that specific requirements related to patient navigator training programs be established to ensure the quality of services provided to patients. Such requirements may include minimum qualification requirements, such as education requirements, prior work experience, appropriate background checks, and specified levels of expertise in community health care. NASW was also able to make sure that these grants would be available to professionals with established training. This may prove to be an excellent grant opportunity for social workers.

Family Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) strengthened the American family by helping millions balance work and family responsibilities. Opponents of the law are pressuring the Department of Labor (DOL) to roll back the FMLA by decreasing the number of illnesses for which employees can take job-protected leave and not allowing use of the leave intermittently for treatments such as chemotherapy and physical therapy sessions. The DOL is expected to propose changes to the law in the coming weeks.

NASW ACTION

NASW believes that working Americans need the Department of Labor and Congress to provide more solutions as they struggle to balance work and family, not undermine these critical protections. NASW will continue to work with other groups such as Families USA and the National Partnership for Women and Families to ensure that the FMLA remains secure for working Americans.

Respite Care

The Lifespan Respite Care Act of 2005 (S.1283) was recently introduced by Sen. Clinton (D-NY) to establish a program to assist family caregivers in accessing affordable and high-quality respite care, and for other purposes. The Lifespan Respite Care Act would authorize funds for: (1) development of state and local lifespan respite programs based on models and best practices; (2) evaluation of such programs; (3) planned or emergency respite care services; (4) training and recruitment of respite care workers and volunteers; and (5) caregiver training.

Currently, there is no single, coordinated, family/caregiver-friendly federal program to support the development or implementation of lifespan respite services nationwide. Despite the numerous federal programs which have the potential to fund respite or crisis services, states often do not know about them, how to apply, or just don't see the need for respite. When respite funding is "blended" with other funding streams, respite often becomes the last service funded as it is competing with services such as child protective service initiatives. Caregivers of individuals with special needs do not know where to find respite care.

NASW ACTION

NASW has been working with the Respite Care Coalition and key Senators and Representatives to gain support for the legislation. We are now seeking co-sponsors in the House and Senate and will attend visits on the Hill along with members of the coalition.

Association Health Plans (AHPs)

The Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2005 (H.R.525/S.406) that would allow small businesses to buy health insurance through business and trade associations and allow AHPs to operate without state oversight is steadily moving through Congress.

NASW ACTION

NASW opposes the creation of national Association Health Plans (AHPs) and has joined over 1,050 national and local organizations that have united in opposition. Organizations' concerns are expressed in the many letters they are sending to Congress. House Republican aides said floor action is expected on H.R.525 during the last week of July.

Health Professions Education Act

The Health Professions Education Act (Title VII) is scheduled for reauthorization this year. One of the goals for NASW is to be designated as an allied health professional under this Act. This designation would have both training funding, particularly for graduate social work education programs, and workforce data compilation implications.

The HRSA Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages formally approved a recommendation supporting the inclusion of social work as an allied health profession under Title VII, which it incorporated into its April 2002 Report to Congress. The report is being released and should be available to us in the next month or so.

NASW ACTION

NASW is working with the Friends of HRSA Coalition to get funding appropriated for Title VII. NASW's recommendation is to provide at least \$550 million to support Title VII and VIII programs in FY 2006.

Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2005

Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2005 (H.R.1227/S.306) introduced by Sen. Snowe (D-ME) and Rep. Biggert (R-IL) defines genetic information as information about the genetic tests of an individual or family member or the occurrence of a disease or disorder in family members of an individual. The bill specifically excludes information about the age or sex of an individual.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions passed S. 306, but the House referred H.R.1227, its companion bill, to the House Committees on Education and the Workforce and on Ways and Means. No further action has occurred on this legislation.

NASW ACTION

NASW has been working with the Coalition for Genetic Fairness in asking the House to take up this bill and pass it. NASW staff has made a several visits to the Hill in support of this legislation.

Health Disparities

NASW is focused on recognizing the role of behavior in federal legislation aimed at eliminating racial, ethnic, and other health disparities.

Recently, the Democratic leadership of the House of Representatives and Senate held a joint press conference to unveil a set of principles for any legislation that addresses health disparities. These principles aim to expand the health care safety net, diversify the health care work force, combat diseases that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities, emphasize prevention and behavioral health, promote the collection and dissemination of data and enhance medical research, and provide interpreters and translation services in the delivery of health care.

NASW ACTION

NASW and the National Coalition on Health and Behavior are advocating for the inclusion of these principles in health-disparities legislation, while targeting much needed attention to the critical role of behavioral factors and behavioral research. We continue to meet with congressional offices of both parties in the House and Senate.

Federal Workers Compensation Claims

NASW supports the introductions of the Clinical Social Workers' Recognition Act of 2005 (S.127) by Sen. Inouye (D-HI) in the Senate. This legislation would authorize the use of clinical social workers to conduct evaluations to determine work-related emotional and mental illnesses for federal employees who have applied for Workers' Compensation coverage.

Currently the law restricts mental health providers who can perform mental health evaluations for federal employees, excluding social workers. The code was last amended in 1974 and much has changed since that time in the delivery of mental health services and the recognition of social workers as critical to mental health care in the United States.

NASW ACTION

NASW staff has made a number of visits to the Hill to educate staff and Members of Congress on the advancement of social work over the past several years and are targeting committee members to gain support for the legislation.

Ryan White Care Act

Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act is being reauthorized this year. Initially passed in 1990, reauthorized in 1996 and again in 2000, the CARE Act is a crucial piece of legislation that, as a payer of last resort, is designed to address the gaps left by Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, and other publicly financed healthcare systems. It is an essential part of our nation's response to the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic.

NASW ACTION

NASW is currently working with several other organizations that represent diverse stakeholder communities to persuade Congress to reauthorize the Act before it expires on September 30, 2005.

LOAN FORGIVENESS

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Loan Forgiveness and the Higher Education Act (HEA)

Speculation that the reauthorization of the 1998 Higher Education Act (HEA) would be delayed, once again, until next year may have been premature. The new chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, Sen. Michael Enzi (R-WY), has revived the process in the Senate. The House Education and Workforce Committee is scheduled to take up its bill in mid-July.

The primary legislative vehicle in the House is the College Access and Opportunity Act (H.R.609), introduced by committee chair, Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), although a Democratic alternative, the College Opportunity for All Act (H.R.2960), has been introduced by the committee's ranking member, Rep. George Miller (D-CA). Chairman Enzi has not yet introduced a bill, but the HELP Committee's ranking member, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA), has introduced the College Quality, Affordability, and Diversity Improvement Act (S.371).

Only one of the bills, Rep. Miller's College Opportunity for All Act, includes loan forgiveness provisions for social workers. The bill would provide loan forgiveness for a number of different professionals, including social workers and others who work in child welfare and any professional who works in a "public service profession that suffers from a critical lack of qualified personnel and serves a low-income or needy community." The Miller bill provisions are similar, if not identical to, provisions in the Child Protective Services Student Loan Forgiveness Act (H.R.127), introduced by Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH), that would provide loan forgiveness for social work students who go into child welfare and the Higher Education Affordability Resource Act (H.R.151), introduced by Rep. Robert Menendez (D-CA), that would provide loan forgiveness for various public service workers, including child welfare workers, nurses, first responders, and teachers.

NASW ACTION

NASW continues to promote the need for loan forgiveness for social workers. However, given the challenges posed by current economic and political realities, the Association also is exploring other ways to help social workers struggling with high student loan debt and low salaries. One such proposal would modify the current Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) program. Under the program, graduates pay approximately 20 percent of their income for 25 years and after that, any remaining balance is forgiven.

Proposals NASW is supporting would reduce the 25-year timeframe to 15 years (H.R.1859 introduced by Rep. Rick Renzi, R-AZ) and 10 years (S.751 introduced by Sen. Kennedy) for graduates who work in government agencies or nonprofit organizations. NASW is collaborating with the American Bar Association on the proposal, along with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and others.

Loan forgiveness advocacy tools and information on current loan forgiveness programs available to social workers are posted on NASW's loan forgiveness advocacy page:

<http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/issues/loanForgiveness.asp>

MENTAL HEALTH

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

Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act (CSWMEA)

Because of a provision in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, clinical social workers may no longer bill Medicare directly for psychotherapy services to clients residing in skilled nursing facilities. The situation is complicated by the severely inadequate national policy on the provision of mental health services under Medicare. On May 26, 2005, Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Reps. Fortney "Pete" Stark (D-CA) and James Leach (R-IA) reintroduced the Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act of 2005

S.1148/H.R.2736, to address this issue. The Senate Finance Committee briefly considered the bill in 2003, but it did not pass. For more information, see NASW's Web site:

<http://www.naswdc.org/advocacy/alerts/2003/101003a.asp>

NASW ACTION

The Association has been working with key Senators and Representatives to gain support for the legislation and is now seeking co-sponsors in the House and Senate. NASW is also building grassroots membership support for the measure in target states and congressional districts.

Mental Health Services Appropriations

Congress is currently working on the Labor-HHS appropriations bill funding the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for FY2006. The President's budget for SAMHSA and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) included some cuts, but the House bill restored many of these deficits. Currently the Senate is considering its version of the bill; its funding levels are not yet decided. Once the Senate passes its version, a conference committee will be called to resolve the differences in spending levels.

NASW ACTION

NASW is working with its coalition partners in the Mental Health Liaison Group to support increased funding levels for mental health and other SAMHSA programs. NASW staff has made a number of visits to the Hill to support appropriations for the agency.

Medicaid Child Health Legislation

The Family Opportunity Act (S.183/HR.1443) would allow families with incomes up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level to buy into Medicaid on a sliding-scale basis. The Congress nearly passed the legislation in 2004, which gave it bipartisan support. However, congressional disagreement over the bill's financing derailed its final passage in December. The Bush Administration supports a new outreach campaign called "Cover the Kids," which would redirect planned expenditures into efforts to reach more children who are eligible for Medicaid or State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) coverage. Unfortunately, the President's budget this year would offset this increase with other cuts in Medicaid funds to the states.

NASW ACTION

NASW works with its coalition partners in the Consortium for Citizens With Disabilities to support passage of the Family Opportunity Act and to protect funding for Medicaid and SCHIP programs.

Keeping Families Together Act (S.183/H.R.1443)

Reintroduced in February, the Keeping Families Together Act 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 to receive mental health services. Eligible states would have laws or policies in effect to ensure that children receive appropriate mental health services so that parents do not have to relinquish legal custody of their children to obtain needed care. The program would assist states in establishing an infrastructure for interagency cooperation and cross-system financing. It would also have expanded 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. NASW supports the bill through a broad coalition of mental health and family advocacy organizations.

Medicaid Spending

The Bush Administration and GOP congressional leaders continue to seek large cuts in federal expenditures for Medicaid. This year the Administration has proposed dramatic cuts in targeted case management services, which NASW has vigorously opposed along with other cuts to the program. Concurrent to its legislative strategy, the Administration has also increased pressure on states to tighten up their administrative procedures, some of which Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) claims constitute waste, fraud, and abuse. Meanwhile, states continue to grapple with record high Medicaid expenditures, resulting in tremendous federal and state interest in capping program expenditures.

NASW ACTION

This year the Administration and Congress are seeking much larger cuts in Medicaid, and NASW has greatly increased its advocacy support for the program. NASW works closely with a national coalition of health care and disability advocates to vigorously oppose cuts. In addition, NASW has worked to educate key members of Congress about the vital role of Medicaid in financing public mental health services.

Mental Health Parity (HR.1402)

Political opposition from business and House GOP leaders has stymied NASW and its coalition partners' support for passage of the "Paul Wellstone Equitable Mental Health Treatment Act." Senate Republican leadership promised lead sponsors Sens. Peter Domenici (R-NM) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) to consider the bill early in 2004, but this did not happen. In the House, Speaker Dennis Hastert remains a steadfast opponent of the bill. Lead House sponsor Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) told NASW staff this year that the overwhelming need is to boost political support for mental health parity as all of the factual arguments of opponents have been answered. For background information on the measure, see the action alert page of the NASW Web site: <http://www.naswdc.org/advocacy/alerts/2004/050104.asp>

NASW ACTION

In conjunction with the Mental Health Liaison Group, NASW supports passage of full mental and behavioral health parity. Given the increased influence of conservatives in Congress, prospects for the legislation are weaker in 2005 than in the past.

SOCIAL SECURITY

By Lawrence Moore, III, senior government relations associate

Currently, Social Security is under the most severe assault in its history. President Bush's proposal allowing workers to divert a portion of their Social Security contributions to private accounts would profoundly undermine the entire system. It would cut Social Security benefits by 41 percent by 2066, impose large transition costs of nearly \$5 trillion over 20 years, and dramatically worsen America's debt. Moreover, benefits would be cut for all, even those who do not choose private accounts. For 70 years, Social Security has been the bedrock of income security for virtually all Americans, providing benefits to retirees, women, children, those with disabilities, as well as the survivors of retired and deceased workers. NASW believes that this vital anti-poverty program is the bridge that spans class, race, income, and generations. Therefore, the Association opposes the Presidents' proposal to privatize, or radically alter the foundation of Social Security.

NASW ACTION

NASW, in concert with national coalitions such as Campaign for America's Future, AARP, AFL-CIO, Alliance for Retired Americans, Congressional Black Caucus, and others, has consistently opposed the President's proposal to privatize Social Security. The Association to date has attended over 10 policy briefings concerning the President's proposal, as well as sent a letter to the entire Congress outlining NASW'S opposition to Social Security reformation. Additionally, through participation in a letter drop and extensive advocacy visits, the Association has encouraged House and Senate Members to oppose any plan that attempts to privatize Social Security.

SOCIAL SERVICES BLOCK GRANT (SSBG)

By Ann Bradford Vaughan, MSW, senior government relations associate

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 settings possible. SSBG was funded at \$2.8 billion in 1996; however, its funding has since been cut by over \$1 billion.

The President's Budget Request for FY06 includes \$1.7 billion for the SSBG program. In addition to this money, Sen. Santorum (R-PA) was successful in his attempt to add \$1 billion to SSBG as part of the TANF reauthorization bill before the Senate Finance Committee voted on it. If this language remains in the final bill passed by both the Senate and the House, this increase in funds will be extended over a five-year period. However, it is highly unlikely that this money will remain in the bill once it goes to conference since the Administration has opposed similar increases in the past.

NASW ACTION

NASW strongly supports an increase in funding for SSBG. Therefore, NASW continues to partner with other organizations from the Social Services Block Grant Coalition to lobby for additional SSBG funds to be included in the TANF reauthorization bill, in addition to fighting any cuts that might be made to SSBG in the federal budget.

WELFARE

By Cynthia Woodside, senior government relations associate

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act/TANF

In late June, Congress extended the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) for the tenth time. The latest extension runs through September 30, 2005, with an

additional extension or extensions likely to be needed before a full five-year reauthorization can be signed into law.

The most likely scenario is that the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program will be included in the budget reconciliation bill, a massive document primarily designed to make required budget cuts in entitlement programs. Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Max Baucus (D-MT), the chair and ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over TANF, had hoped to move the welfare bill separately, but other senators, including Budget Committee chairman, Judd Gregg (R-NH), who are concerned about the bill's cost are insisting that TANF reauthorization be part of the reconciliation process.

The last legislative action on TANF reauthorization occurred on March 15, 2005 when the Human Resources Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee approved the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R.240). The Senate Finance Committee approved its version of the bill, the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) Act (S.667), on March 9.

Additional information is posted on NASW's welfare reauthorization advocacy page:
<http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/welfare/default.asp>

NASW ACTION

Despite congressional inaction, NASW has continued to promote issues identified as Association reauthorization priorities—improving services to families with disabilities and other barriers to employment, reducing disparate treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, increasing access to education, including higher education, restoring benefit eligibility for immigrants, and increasing funding for child care. NASW also continues to oppose the “superwaiver” provision, increased work hours, full-family sanctions, and funding for narrowly focused marriage promotion activities.

CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

By Mirean Coleman, MSW, LICSW, CT, senior policy associate

Managed Care and Third-Party Payers

The application process for the National Provider Identifier (NPI) became effective May 23, 2005. In response to a large volume of calls from members about the NPI, a news alert was placed on the home page of the Web site and included instructions about how to apply. Clinical social workers who seek reimbursement from third-party payers will be required to obtain an NPI by May 23, 2007.

The American Psychiatric Association draft practice guidelines for substance use disorders were reviewed and comments were made.

Staff assisted in the preparation of a letter to the Department of Labor requesting that they amend Chapter 81 Subpart G of Title 5, United States Code to include clinical social workers as providers of mental health assessments for federal employees who have applied for Workers' Compensation coverage. A Congressional hearing was attended on May 26 that discussed an amendment to include physician assistants and nurses as part of this law. NASW is making plans to be a part of this legislative amendment.

Technical assistance and information was provided to NASW Indiana Chapter on psychological testing and social workers. A plan of action was developed to assist them with the issues confronting them in this area.

Ongoing assistance was provided to clinical social workers experiencing overpayment requests from third-party payers due to lack of adequate documentation and to those who received Medicare overpayment requests for services billed in a Part A stay of a skilled nursing facility.

Meetings

Staff attended the American Medical Association Relative Valued Update Committee Meeting and its Health Care Professional Advisory Committee Meeting in Chicago, IL on April 27–30, 2005. Staff participated in the review and approval process for work and practice expense values of Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Codes used for reimbursement.

Staff also attended the CPT Editorial Panel Committee Meeting in New Orleans, LA on June 2–4, 2005. Staff participated in the approval process for the descriptors of new and revised codes used for reimbursement.

The American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, and NASW met June 29 to discuss mental health indicators for mental health professionals for a new reimbursement procedure, “Pay for Performance,” expected to enter the payment system soon.

Practice Updates

A new practice update, “Psychotherapy Notes and Reimbursement Claims,” was published in May to address reimbursement problems encountered by clinical social workers when billing third-party payers.

A “Did You Know” column was written for the Private Practice Specialty Practice Section Newsletter.

Presentations

A workshop was conducted on “Documenting and Collecting Reimbursement in the Clinical Setting” at the NASW Missouri Chapter Annual Conference in April which was well received by participants.

Standards

NASW developed with the Association of Social Work Boards a draft document, “Technology Standards,” which is now on the Web site for a 60-day member comment period.

FIELD ORGANIZING

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

Grassroots Activities

As of June 30, 2005, 1,760 individuals subscribe to the Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv.

During the quarter, 546 individuals sent 3,110 letters and/or e-mails through Congress Web to their Congressional representatives. The issues that generated the most grassroots efforts included the Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program, loan forgiveness, federal budget, TANF Reauthorization, the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program, and child welfare appropriations. A table showing activity level in all issues follows.

Subject Area	Number of Letters/E-mails
Aging: Advance Directives	142
Child Welfare: CAPTA Appropriations	192
Child Welfare: Title IV-E Training	637
Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act	162
Compose Your Own	138
Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program	192
Fair Minimum Wage Act	93
Faith-Based Initiative (Workforce Improvement Act and Head Start)	103
Federal Budget	535
Hate Crimes Bill	37
Judicial Nominations	50
Loan Forgiveness: Child Welfare	467
Mental Health Parity	100
National Center for Social Work Research Act	38
Small Business Health Fairness Act	31
TANF Reauthorization	193

National and chapter staff continued to mobilize members in key states to attend rallies to support Social Security preservation.

Staff promoted grassroots efforts to lobby Sen. Snowe (R-ME) to become an original co-sponsor of the Clinical Social Work Medicare Equity Act. Due to pressing concerns in her state about military base closures, she was unable to sign on as an original co-sponsor.

Presentations

On April 1, Dina Zarrella gave the keynote address at the Nebraska Chapter Annual Conference. Her presentation was titled “Social Workers Organizing for Social Change.”

On June 10, Dina Zarrella presented a workshop, “Legislative Advocacy and Political Action for Social Workers,” at the Minnesota Chapter Annual Conference.

Web Site Development

Eight action alerts and three updates have been posted on the Association’s Web site this quarter. The action alerts were also sent directly to chapter presidents, chapter executive directors, and the Legislative Advocacy Network Listserv. You can view the alerts and updates on NASW’s Web site:

www.socialworkers.org/advocacy

A toolkit for grassroots advocacy on the Title IV-E Training Program was added to the Web site at <http://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy/answer/cwResources/default.asp>

POLITICAL ACTION FOR CANDIDATE ELECTION (PACE)

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

2006 Congressional Endorsements and Contributions

The national PACE Board of Trustees made their first round of formal congressional endorsements in a teleconference call held on April 8, 2005. During this call, the Trustees authorized endorsements and contributions totaling \$55,000 to 11 senate incumbents, including one social worker, Sen. Debbie

Stabenow (D-MI). Trustees also authorized endorsements and contributions totaling \$19,000 to four house incumbents who are social workers: Barbara Lee (D-CA-09), Susan Davis (D-CA-53), Ed Towns (D-NY-10), and Allyson Schwartz (D-PA-13).

Candidate Interviews

As part of its endorsement assessment process, PACE staff met with and interviewed challenger candidates running for Congress in Tennessee, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

Fundraisers

Government relations staff attended 18 fundraisers from April through June. They attended the fundraisers for three Democratic members of the U.S. Senate and 12 members of the U.S. House (three Republicans and eight Democrats). In addition, government relations staff attended 11 donor council events (six Republican and five Democratic). Donor councils are groups that provide access to members of Congress or a political party through meetings, issue briefings, and other events.

PACE Certification

Every year, chapters are required to certify with National PACE to receive the funds due to their PACE. Chapter certification material was due back to National PACE in early February and National PACE has been working with chapters since then to ensure they meet their certification requirements. Thus far, National PACE has certified 39 chapters, is working with five chapters to meet their certification requirements, and is still waiting to receive certification materials from four chapters.

Social Workers Serving in Elective Office

After the November 2004 election, National PACE began to update its social workers serving in state and local office guide. Chapters were asked to complete and submit a form to PACE following the November election for each elected official in their state who holds a BSW, MSW, or DSW. PACE is in the process of finalizing this guide which will be posted on NASW's Web site in July. This guide is updated biennially in the year following federal election cycles.

STAFF UPDATES

After 27 years of service, Dave Dempsey, ACSW, retired from NASW on June 30, 2005. He had led the Office of Government Relations and Political Action since 1999.

After nearly four years of service, Ann Bradford Vaughan, MSW, senior government relations associate, left the Association on June 10. Ann worked on a variety of issues including the faith-based initiative, school counseling, appropriations, and social work research.