

Washington Update

April 13, 2016

Improving Access to Mental Health Act of 2015 (S.2173/H.R. 3712)

Since launching our action alert in October, 2015, 1,689 advocates sent 5,549 emails to Congress about the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 2173/H.R. 3712)*. You can find the alert on our [web site](#).

Thanks to advocacy from the Connecticut Chapter, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) signed on as a co-sponsor. Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY-15) and Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR-4) also signed on as co-sponsors since our last update.

Co-sponsors of the legislation include: (** indicates original sponsor; * indicates original cosponsor)

Senate

- Sen. Stabenow, Debbie [D-MI]** 10/08/2015
- Sen. Mikulski, Barbara A. [D-MD]* 10/08/2015
- Sen. Murphy, Christopher S. [D-CT] 02/25/2016
- Sen. Blumenthal, Richard [D-CT] 04/07/2016

House of Representatives

- Rep. Lee, Barbara [D-CA-13]** 10/08/2015
- Rep. Ashford, Brad [D-NE-2] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Bordallo, Madeleine Z. [D-GU-At Large]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Brown, Corrine [D-FL-5]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Clarke, Yvette D. [D-NY-9]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Cohen, Steve [D-TN-9] 10/16/2015
- Rep. DeFazio, Peter A. [D-OR-4] 04/11/2016
- Rep. Grijalva, Raul M. [D-AZ-3]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Gutierrez, Luis V. [D-IL-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Honda, Michael M. [D-CA-17]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. McCollum, Betty [D-MN-4] 12/09/2015
- Rep. Moore, Gwen [D-WI-4] 10/16/2015
- Rep. Norton, Eleanor Holmes [D-DC-At Large]* 10/08/2015
- Rep. Schakowsky, Janice D. [D-IL-9] 10/20/2015
- Rep. Serrano, Jose E. [D-NY-15] 03/14/2016
- Rep. Watson Coleman, Bonnie [D-NJ-12]* 10/08/2015

NASW has secured supporters of the legislation, listed below:

- American Geriatrics Society
- Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

- Clinical Social Work Association
- Council on Social Work Education
- Justice in Aging
- NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
- National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
- National Coalition for Care Coordination (N3C)
- National League for Nursing
- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

On April 25, 2016, NASW National Staff, Polsinelli Staff and NASW Chapter Staff will be holding a webinar to discuss the legislation and ways to organize around it. A link to the webinar registration was sent to Chapter Executive Directors and Government Relations Staff.

As part of the NASW National Conference pre-conference activities, NASW is holding an Advocacy Program on Capitol Hill. There was room for 150 participants and it is fully subscribed.

Other Legislative Activity

Older Americans Act: In late March, the House of Representatives passed its version of the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015 (S. 192). The bill has returned to the Senate for approval. NASW signed on to an [open letter](#) urging House support for the bill.

Mental Health Bills: On March 16th, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions passed the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S.2680) to help Americans suffering from mental health and substance use disorders. This legislation looks at initiatives to encourage individuals to pursue careers in social work, especially in rural and underserved areas and populations. Furthermore, this legislation has licensed clinical social workers on the list of possible non-federal advisory committee members, and includes social workers as a member of the pediatric mental health team. NASW continues to track this and other mental health bills as they work through the legislative process.

When the bill was taken up in Committee, Sen. Murphy (D-CT) specifically mentioned the support of social workers for the Cassidy-Murphy bill.

Social Work Month: Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced the Social Work Month Resolution (S. Res. 399) on March 15, 2016 with original co-sponsors Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Sen. Al Franken (D-MN). NASW posted an action alert about this legislation from which advocates sent 1,163 messages to Congress. You can find the alert on our [web site](#).

FY 17 Budget/Appropriation Requests: NASW submitted requests for report language to address child welfare workforce development, Health and Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI) services and behavioral health workforce education and training/improve training in safety protocols.

Budget/Appropriation Meetings: Staff participated in hill visits related to the budget and appropriations through the SAVE for All Coalition. Offices visited include:

- Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN)
- Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE)
- Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-IL)
- Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
- Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)
- Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI)
- Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Commission to End Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities

The [final report](#) from the Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities is now available. It presents the Commission's findings and its recommendations to the White House and Congress for ending child maltreatment fatalities in the United States within the context of a new child welfare system for the 21st century. NASW was instrumental in passing the legislation that set up the Commission.

The Administration

NASW submitted comments in support of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Proposed Rule 42 C.F.R. Part 2- Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records. The letter emphasizes that the right to confidentiality of substance use disorder treatment records, and client-controlled decisions around consent, must be prioritized while also facilitating care coordination in modern health care systems. With the support of analysis provided by the Legal Action Center, the NASW letter also highlights areas in the proposed rule that need clarification for appropriate implementation. The letter will be posted on the NASW web page. For now, you can find it at [regulations.gov](#).

Supreme Court

On March 23, 2016, NASW participated in a presence at the Supreme Court and a digital rally seeking to highlight the need for supporting the right of all employees to access health care without discrimination, even while accommodating their employer's religious beliefs. The case is *Zubik v. Burwell*. A decision should be coming later this year. NASW joined in filing an [amicus brief](#) in this case. There is a [blog](#) about NASW's activities.

Coalition Work

NASW participated in coalition work with:

- Eldercare Workforce Alliance
- Leadership Council of Aging Organizations
- National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging
- Social Work and Health Care Work Group
- National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

- Coalition on Human Needs
- American Bar Association Commission on Youth at Risk Annual Meeting

Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) Meeting

There was no April MHLG meeting.

Support Letters

NASW has signed onto a number of letters of support. You can find a list of letters of support on our [web page](#). A sample of letters from March is below.

- [NASW signs on to open letter urging the House of Representatives to approve amendments to the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, S. 192 \(03/21/16\)](#)
- [NASW signs onto letter supporting the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 \(03/15/16\)](#)

NASW has also submitted its own comments to the Administration. You can find this list on our [web page](#) as well. The comments from March are below.

- [NASW writes letter in support of the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 \(3/10/16\)](#)