

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Ted Kaufman
Chairman
Biden-Harris Transition Team
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

RE: NASW Letter to Biden and Harris Presidential Transition Team

Dear Senator Kaufman:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) offers our sincere congratulations to President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on their victory in the 2020 presidential election. We proudly endorsed Joe Biden for President and Kamala Harris, the first female and woman of color for Vice President and are thrilled with this historic ticket. We are eager to get to work in partnership with the transition team and wanted to share with you our key priorities for supporting and strengthening the social work profession and the individuals, families and communities we serve.

There are over 750,000 professional social workers nationwide and they are the largest provider of mental, behavioral and social care, and many of us have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic as an essential workforce. NASW has proudly represented the interests of social workers since its founding 65 years ago and has long championed the causes to which the President-elect and Vice President-elect have demonstrated their commitment.

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. We work in a broad range of settings including healthcare, social services departments, schools, child welfare, criminal and juvenile justice settings, and in private clinical practice. We are also administrators, community organizers and policy professionals. Indeed, we count among our ranks six members of Congress who are social workers and we are especially proud that President-elect Biden's daughter, Ashley is a social worker. Social workers play a key role in advancing social justice, on which NASW has a robust advocacy portfolio which it advocates at both the national and state levels. Our portfolio and its racial equity lens aligns with Biden's domestic priorities, including economic equity, healthcare equity, immigration justice, criminal and juvenile justice, among others.

Below are some of our key priorities, which we will further detail in a subsequent transition plan.

COVID-19 Response

We look forward to working with the COVID-19 Advisory Board and commend you for making its creation one of your first acts in the transition. Social workers have been advising communities in their COVID-19 response efforts, as they have a keen understanding of the needs of their communities regarding the pandemic's devastating economic, health and mental health impacts. We would welcome the opportunity to provide experts for this or other bodies that you assemble to address the public health crisis.

We are deeply concerned that Black, Brown and Native American communities are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 because of pre-pandemic inequities in economic opportunity and health care access, among other disparities. We are also concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 on rural communities and on undocumented and mixed status immigrant communities. We ask the administration to act quickly to protect all communities of color and direct the necessary resources to mitigate the spread of the virus by increasing the availability of testing; ensuring access to equitable treatment; and disseminating timely, relevant, and culturally appropriate public health information. Social workers also need to be provided with adequate personal protective equipment. They work in numerous settings where they are at risk of infection but are not receiving sufficient protection.

Teletherapy Permanence

Teletherapy services are now the predominant form of mental health treatment for millions of Americans during the COVID-19 crisis, in keeping with the need for physical distancing. We welcomed the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) expansion of telehealth, which has been instrumental in ensuring that individuals receive urgently-needed mental and behavioral health services. NASW also welcomed the extension of modalities to include audio-only devices, a policy for which we advocated vigorously. It is imperative that this expansion is made permanent, including but not limited to payment parity with in-person services and audio-only access.

Protecting and Expanding the Affordable Care Act

With the Affordable Care Act (ACA) imperiled by the recent shift to a majority conservative Supreme Court, NASW asks the administration to work with Congress to take action as needed to provide healthcare access should ACA be invalidated. The Bidencare proposal is a promising approach and would address the healthcare needs that the pandemic has laid bare, especially for low-income and vulnerable people.

Mental Health Services Expansion

Social workers play a key role in effective emergency response systems, whereby social workers and other mental health providers may be deployed as first or co-responders as appropriate in lieu of police. We are trained to de-escalate and intervene with individuals who are experiencing a crisis. We ask the administration to foster further implementation

of these and other systems to improve crisis response, which are needed all the more during the current crisis.

NASW has been working to expand access by Medicare beneficiaries to clinical social worker (CSW) services. We are the largest provider of services in this federal program. Despite our participation in Medicare for over 30 years and our extensive education and training, we are still reimbursed at only 75% of the psychologist fee schedule. This is another barrier to care that is highly problematic during a pandemic that has been especially devastating for older Americans. We urge the administration to take prompt action to remove these barriers.

Police Reform and Reimagining Public Safety

We urge the administration to exhibit leadership in eradicating racist and oppressive policing and invest in the economic and social supports needed to promote safe communities. This includes deploying more social workers in schools and reducing the footprint of police in these settings.

Action on Executive Orders, Regulations

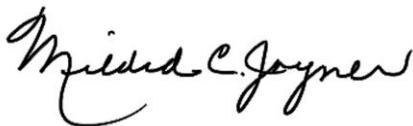
Another important first order of business should be to take action regarding the harmful executive orders, rule and guidance issued by the current administration. These include, but are not limited to:

- Rescind the Executive Order “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping”
- Halt implementation of the Public Charge Rule
- Issue final regulations on the Flores Agreement Settlement

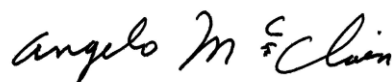
We look forward to providing further detail about these and other priorities, and to working together to advance our shared goals. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to exchange ideas. Furthermore, we urge you to include social workers in the transition team and would be happy to recommend national experts to that end.

If you have any questions, please contact Anna Mangum, Deputy Director of Programs, at amangum.nasw@socialworkers.org Sarah Christa Butts, Director of Public Policy, at sbutts.nasw@socialworkers.org.

Sincerely,



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President



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