

July 26th, 2020

To the parties contained herein:

We, the Board of Directors to the Nebraska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-NE) are writing to you to convey our collective concern and distress, as a membership-based organization representing social workers across the State of Nebraska, regarding the recent arrest and detention of approximately 75-80 citizens peacefully exercising their right to protest and assemble near the intersection of 28th and Farnam in Omaha, Nebraska on the evening of July 25th, 2020 by the Omaha Police Department (OPD).

We, as a Board of Directors, **condemn these arrests** as counter-productive to the protection and promotion of the civil liberties, rights, and freedoms which are fundamental to all individuals and our society, as well as to the maintenance of our democracy.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), our national organization, is an organization that was collectively established by social work practitioners to achieve many aims, with some of the highest among them being to “further the broad objective of improving conditions of life in our democratic society through utilization of the professional knowledge and skills of social work and to expand through research the knowledge necessary to define and attain these goals” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW] Delegate Assembly, 2019) & “promote diversity, inclusion, cultural competency, and social justice” (NASW Delegate Assembly, 2019). **We find the impact of these arrests to be antithetical in nature to the aforementioned mission that guides our organization.**

To achieve the aforementioned aims, NASW has committed to “at all times recognize and carry out a threefold responsibility: (1) to promote activities appropriate to strengthening and unifying the social work profession as a whole, (2) to promote the sound and continuous development of the various area of social work practice whereby the profession contributes to the meeting of particular aspects of human need, and (3) to promote efforts on behalf of human well-being by methods of social action” (NASW Delegate Assembly, 2019). **We find the impact of these arrests to be antithetical in nature to the aforementioned commitments we’ve made to our constituency.**

We as a Board of Directors believe, that in arresting these protesters, the OPD engaged in conduct that did not recognize the good-faith contribution these protesters sought to make to the development of a more critical and robust democracy, built on equity and civil liberty, in our nation. We would like to point out that these protesters aimed to achieve this objective not through violent and disruptive means, but through non-violent direct action, or more simply, a march of solidarity.



According to the NASW’s national policy statement on civil liberties and social justice, “the social work profession vigorously seeks to affirm a national commitment to recognizing that freedoms are fundamental to all individuals and our society” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], Wehrmann, & McClain, 2018).

Furthermore, “there have been times in American history when constitutionally protected freedoms have been under attack at the local, state, and federal levels” (NASW 2018), and presently, we the NASW-NE Board of Directors believe this to be one of those times.

In response to the aforementioned arrests, and with the highest consideration toward NASW’s commitment to the protection of individual rights and the promotion of social justice, we, the NASW-NE Board of Directors, formally request:

- The immediate release of all peaceful protesters who were arrested near the intersection of 28th and Farnam in Omaha, Nebraska on the evening of July 25th, 2020 by OPD;
- All public officials in the city of Omaha, and specifically, the Mayor of Omaha, all members of the Omaha City Council, and the Chief of Police, consider the following recommendations in light of our condemnation of these actions by the OPD:
 1. Consider expanding alternatives in Omaha, Nebraska to detention and incarceration, and development of an accessible, community-based network of resources that affords preventive services, mental health assessments, and early treatment for both juvenile and adult offenders; services must adhere to standards of care and be evaluated based on best practices models.
 2. Consider use of force standards and comprehensive disaggregated data collection on the use of force incidents by every authority in Omaha, Nebraska.
 3. Consider further discussion and training regarding the principle of habeas corpus, which safeguards people from unlawful imprisonment.
 4. Consider public investment in full funding for comprehensive civil and criminal legal aid services.
 5. We oppose the establishment/utilization of any sort of protocol or policy which contains or promotes the following:
 - a. The use of mandatory sentencing requirements, particularly for first-time offenders.
 - b. Any threats to freedom to the press and due process.

We thank you for your time and consideration of this letter, and we look forward to your response to our recommendations.

In Solidarity,

NASW-NE Board of Directors



Notes

1. The aforementioned policy statement was approved by the NASW Delegate Assembly in August of 2017. This policy statement supersedes the policy statement on Civil Liberties and Justice approved by the Delegate Assembly in August 2008. For further information, contact the National Association of Social Workers, 750 First Street, NE, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20002-4241. Telephone: 202-408-8600; e-mail: press@socialworkers.org

References

- NASW Delegate Assembly. (2019). *Bylaws of the National Association of Social Workers* [PDF file]. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YB7sGrhmTvc%3d&portalid=0>
- National Association of Social Workers, Wehrmann, K. C., & McClain, A. (2018). *Social work speaks: national association of social workers policy statements, 2018-2020* (11th ed.). NASW Press.

