



# 2017–2018 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY AGENDA

*National Association of Social Workers, Pennsylvania Chapter*

## I. SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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- A. Ensure practice protection for clinical social workers by requiring competency in the delivery of social work services (relevant legislation: HB 445 / SB 530)

SB 530 would amend the Social Workers, Marriage & Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Act to create practice protection for clinical social workers. Practice protection ensures that only those who hold a professional license to deliver clinical social work services in Pennsylvania may provide such services and treatment.

- B. Add diagnosis to the scope of practice for licensed clinical social workers (relevant legislation: HB 445 / SB 530)

SB 530 would amend the Social Workers, Marriage & Family Therapists and Professional Counselors Act to update the scope of practice for clinical social workers. The Act would be amended to add “diagnosis” to the clinical social worker scope of practice.

- C. Advocate for the implementation of bachelor-level licensure

Former Gov. Tom Corbett signed SB 807, which provided for bachelor-level licensure for social workers, in October 2014. Over three years later, the implementation process has yet to be completed. When implemented, the Commonwealth will add another level of service to its residents by allowing social workers to prove their competence in this manner.

- D. Promote the responsible use of technological advancements to expand access to high-quality care (relevant legislation: SB 780)

Senate Bill 780 would allow licensed health care providers to practice telemedicine. Telemedicine can aid communities in remote or rural areas with few health services because it overcomes distance and time barriers between health-care providers and patients. It can provide important benefits: increased access to health care, expanded utilization of specialty expertise, rapid availability of patient records, and reductions in the cost of patient care.

## II. SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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- A. Enhance workforce standards in the delivery of publicly funded clinical mental health services (relevant legislation: HB 1000 / SB 746)

NASW-PA supports Governor Wolf’s proposal to consolidate four state agencies into a singular Department of Health and Human Services [as a means of providing more efficient services to Pennsylvanians]. Consolidation could help the Commonwealth by creating an opportunity to prioritize uniformity within, and consistency throughout, the health care field regarding standards and regulations. Ideally, this uniformity would foster an era in Pennsylvania health care highlighted by a renewed commitment to and respect for mental health and its importance in the continuum of care.

- B. Ensure a comprehensive continuum of services to elderly and disabled populations to ensure appropriate and high-quality services within local communities (relevant legislation: HB 1124)

House Bill 1124 would amend Title 18 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes regarding the neglect of a care-dependent person. According to Commonwealth statute, a caretaker neglects a care-dependent person if the caretaker intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly causes serious bodily injury or death; intentionally or knowingly uses a physical, chemical restraint or medication; or isolates a care-dependent person contrary to the law with serious bodily injury or death occurring during the isolation. House Bill 1124 would further provide for the offense of neglect of a care-dependent person, and create the offense of abuse of a care-dependent person.

C. Work to elect more diverse representation and social workers to serve in elected office

D. Maintain funding of public social services at sufficient levels to assist the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians

E. Strengthen the quality, training, supervision, and retention of public and private child welfare and school social work professionals by implementing policies that meet or exceed national standards and research-based best practices (relevant legislation: SB 65)

Senate Bill 65 would forgive student loans of Commonwealth residents who use their degrees to work in child welfare. Child welfare workers fulfill society's commitment to provide children with safe, stable and permanent homes. Their extensive knowledge of child development is crucial in determining the most appropriate environment for children and youth.

F. Advocate for individuals who have mental health issues and/or intellectual disabilities (relevant legislation: HB 414)

House Bill 414 includes provisions for the development of a five-year plan to eliminate the waiting list for critical and emergency services developed by the Department of Public Welfare. It is consistent with the NASW ethical principle of respecting the dignity and worth of the person. The Commonwealth can show its support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities by recognizing their contributions to society and the inherent freedom of choice.

G. Promote legislation that provides for services and employment for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation or identity, political ideology, immigration, marital status, or physical or mental condition (relevant legislation: HB 1583, SB 74, SB 44, HB 505)

- i. House Bill 1583 would establish regulations for the provision of workplace accommodations for pregnant workers. It also would prohibit employment discrimination due to pregnancy, except for cases in which the employer can prove that the employee's condition causes undue hardship for the employer.
- ii. Senate Bill 74 would establish a program to help mothers identify and cope with prenatal and postpartum depression. Such a program would help mothers have healthier and more supportive birthing experiences. The program would further provide new parents with the information about signs and symptoms of perinatal depression. It would also provide new mothers with a fact sheet that includes common symptoms of prenatal depression, PPD, postpartum psychosis, and emotional traumas associated with pregnancy and parenting.
- iii. Senate Bill 44 seeks to protect the health and well-being of LGBT minors in Pennsylvania by banning sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) for individuals under the age of 18. "Reparative" or "conversion therapies" assume that same-sex attraction is a defect that should be reversed. Many professional organizations have countered this attitude for decades. Often, minors who receive this therapy are coerced into treatment with false information or forced by parents or guardians. The reports of benefit from this treatment are nearly impossible to find, while reports of increased levels of shame and self-loathing abound.
- iv. House Bill 505 would rename the offense of ethnic intimidation and extend it to include perceived race, ancestry, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity as bases upon which intimidating acts can be considered illegal. The offense would be renamed 'ethnic unlawful intimidation'. NASW-PA is steadfast in its belief that all people deserve to be treated with respect, as the essence of social work is to promote social justice and eliminate discrimination. This legislation is consistent with that ideal.
- v. House Bill 1933 would prohibit the use of CHIP funds for various services related to gender or sex reassignment surgery, or gender or sex transition services including physician services, hospital visits, prescriptions, and even counseling. It endangers some of the very children that the CHIP reauthorization bill – which recently passed the House – is designed to protect. Children and teens who are considering gender or sex transition already face many difficulties. Adding another is insensitive at best, and cruel at worst.

