I. Support Our Essential Social Work Workforce

- **PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK:** Pennsylvania’s social workers are highly educated and qualified, and are the Commonwealth’s most numerous providers of mental health services. They provide critically needed services to millions of Pennsylvanians each year in a broad range of settings including healthcare, schools, child welfare, correctional institutions, community agencies, and private practice. Demand for social workers is expected to grow, but the supply is not projected to keep pace without policy action. Social workers face low salaries, skyrocketing educational debt, safety risks on the job, and regulatory barriers to practice. NASW-PA calls on the General Assembly to ensure a strong social work workforce will be available to meet the needs of Pennsylvanians in crisis.

II. Improve Access to Mental and Behavioral Health and Provide High Quality Health Care to All

- **PERMANENTLY EXPAND TELEHEALTH/TELETHERAPY:** Changes in state policy to allow insurance companies to reimburse providers for care provided remotely has been critical during the COVID-19 crisis and should be made permanent to provide greater access to care. This is especially in mental health, where there are few to no differences in efficacy between in-person and remote therapy. The use of audio-only devices and payment parity with in-person rates are essential components.

- **CONTINUE COVID-19 RECOVERY:** State leaders should ensure that all Pennsylvanians can access COVID testing and treatment at no cost. Additionally, we must deploy the COVID-19 vaccine as quickly as possible, prioritizing essential workers (including social workers) and those at highest risk of poor outcomes, and working to overcome vaccine hesitancy where possible. All recovery measures should address disparities in COVID-19 outcomes and vaccination rates among minority populations.

- **EXPAND HEALTH COVERAGE:** Pennsylvania should expand health coverage by providing a public option or allowing individuals/families to buy-in to Medicaid. We should also take measures to reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

- **REDUCE SUICIDE RATES:** NASW-PA supports efforts to reduce suicide, especially amongst vulnerable and at-risk populations such as elders, military/veterans, and LGBTQ+ youth. These efforts should include better regulation of access to firearms.

III. Ensure Healthy Development for All Youth

- **PROMOTE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK:** Students in Pennsylvania receive inconsistent access to mental health services within the schools, with some districts maintaining multiple school social workers and others having few to none. The data on school social work supports they can alleviate school violence, reduce dropout rates and expulsions, and increase student mental health. NASW-PA supports a shift from law enforcement in schools to mental health care.

- **FUND EDUCATION:** NASW-PA believes children and youth are best served through a high-quality, fully funded educational system that includes preschool, elementary, and secondary education, including the Fair Funding Formula for all allocations.

- **PROTECT AND PROVIDE FOR MALTREATED CHILDREN:** Pennsylvania must ensure that vulnerable children are protected, and adequate resources are allocated to identify abuse and neglect. This includes professionalization of the child welfare workforce.

IV. Advance Long and Productive Lives

- **FUND HOME- AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES (HCBS):** NASW-PA supports providing comprehensive, high-quality, affordable long-term services and supports enabling people with disabilities and older adults to maintain maximal quality of life in their setting of choice, including home- and community-based care. Ensure access to home health, including medical social services.

- **IMPROVE LONG-TERM CARE:** Within long-term care facilities, NASW-PA supports improving the ratio of residents to social services staff, along with strengthening public health measures to prevent spread of illnesses such as COVID-19.

- **ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE:** Pennsylvania must lead in implementing policy, including direct interventions and prevention measures, to reduce the deaths and injuries caused by the public health crisis of gun violence. These efforts must neither further stigmatize mental illness nor exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities in our criminal justice system.

V. End Homelessness and Ensure Equity in and Access to Housing

- **PROTECT HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS:** Pennsylvania should provide assistance to people behind in rent and mortgage payments due to COVID-19 and ensure the moratorium on evictions continues throughout the public health crisis.

- **ENSURE ACCESS TO SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING:** Pennsylvania should expand investment in affordable housing and in programs for homeowners/landlords to make substandard housing livable, energy efficient and free from health hazards.
VI. Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment

- **PRESEVER OUR ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:** NASW-PA supports efforts to protect our environment, including preserving Pennsylvania’s farms, and taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We also support investing in low-income and minority communities harmed by pollution and continuing to eliminate lead from Pennsylvania’s drinking water.

VII. Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality and Build Financial Capability and Assets

- **PROTECT WORKERS:** NASW-PA supports creating livable wages by increasing the minimum wage to a recommended $15/hour and ending sub-minimum wages. Additionally, Pennsylvania should ensure every worker has paid family leave and sick time.

- **REDUCE STUDENT DEBT:** Pennsylvania should make tuition affordable at community colleges and our state colleges/universities, ensuring students can earn a degree without going into debt. NASW-PA supports loan forgiveness or other programs to reduce the debt burden on current students or graduates, especially those working in lower paying jobs or those in underserved areas needed by the Commonwealth to ensure public health.

- **RAISE THE TANF GRANT LEVEL:** The support per person for families dependent on welfare is $145.53 per month, insufficient to cover basic needs. Pennsylvania has not raised the grant levels since 1990, and NASW-PA supports an increase to this rate.

VIII. Eliminate Racism, Advance LGBTQ+ Rights and Equality, and Ensure Gender Equity

- **REDUCE CULTURAL BIAS:** Pennsylvania should require training for those engaged in occupations that interact with the public and licensed through the Department of State that provides understanding of social bias and structural racism and practical techniques to mitigate social bias and improve cultural competence.

- **OPPOSE EFFORTS TO MARGINALIZE TRANS YOUTH:** Bills are being proposed in at least 25 states, including Pennsylvania, to target and marginalize trans youth. One such bill would require school athletic participation to be based on gender assigned at birth. Proponents of these bills argue that they are protecting girls’ sports from unfair competition, but these bills are an attack on the humanity and belonging of trans kids. NASW-PA opposes this and any bill that has the effect of marginalizing trans youth.

- **END CONVERSION THERAPY:** State leaders should 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, also known as “conversion” therapies. Often, minors who receive this therapy are coerced into treatment with false information or forced by parents or guardians. Research on impacts of conversion therapy find it to be harmful and dangerous, including increased levels of shame and self-loathing.

- **ENSURE LGBTQ+ EQUAL PROTECTION:** Pennsylvania should adopt legislation amending the Human Relations Act to add protections against discrimination based on sexual preference and gender identity.

IX. Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice

- **REDUCE UNNECESSARY INCARCERATION:** Pennsylvania should adopt policies to eliminate cash bail, limit the length of probation, and stop the practice of reincarcerating citizens for administrative violations such as missing an appointment.

- **ELIMINATE SYSTEMIC RACISM IN POLICING:** Legislation adopted in 2020 to address police violence against Black and brown citizens is a good first step, but more must be done to address systemic racism in policing, such as increasing citizen oversight, limiting use of lethal force, decertifying officers who are terminated or disciplined for reckless disregard for public safety, and publicly reporting data on routine police activities race by race.

- **ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH’S ROLE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE:** Severe reduction of community mental health services have led to an overrepresentation of the mentally ill within Pennsylvania’s prisons. Additionally, police are often ill prepared to deal with those in mental health crisis, sometimes with tragic results as in the case of Walter Wallace Jr. NASW-PA believes properly trained personnel are essential to humane treatment of those with mental illness. Pennsylvania should invest in mental health and utilize crisis mobile response teams to assist police.

X. Advance Political Justice

- **EXPAND VOTING ACCESS:** Pennsylvania should invest in our democracy by adopting measures that make it easier for its residents to cast their ballots, including early voting, mail-in voting, expansion of voter registration, etc. NASW-PA strongly opposes reducing voter access, especially provisions disproportionately impacting communities of color.

- **END PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING:** NASW-PA supports efforts to improve representation for all Pennsylvanians through fair, independent legislative redistricting that is designed on a non-partisan basis. We oppose efforts to make statewide seats, such as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, subject to partisan gerrymandering.