Social Workers Effectively Working with Law Enforcement

NASW CEO Angelo McClain’s response to the egregious column from neoconservative American Enterprise Institute senior fellow Naomi Schaeffer Riley was posted on the Wall Street Journal today. Due to length limits it was shortened but is still very powerful and effective.

Riley wrote a column that criticized the role of social workers in policing, falsely using a stereotype that social workers cannot work in law enforcement because they are already ineffective in child welfare.

For those who do not have a WSJ subscription here is the full letter:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and many of our 110,000 members were deeply disappointed with a June 8 editorial from the Wall Street Journal titled "Are Social Workers the Answer?"

The author, Naomi Schaefer Riley, responded to calls to defund police departments and tap social workers to fill some roles currently served by police following the tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement. The op-ed criticized professional social workers and used the stereotype that social workers are ineffective in Child Protection Agencies to discredit the many skills and contributions of the social work profession.

Social workers already work alongside and in partnership with police departments across the nation. Strengthening social worker and police partnerships can be an effective strategy in addressing behavioral health, mental health, substance use, homelessness, family disputes and other similar calls to 911 emergency response lines.

In fact, social workers are playing an increasingly integral role in police forces, helping officers do their jobs more effectively and humanely and become better attuned to cultural and racial biases. And studies show social workers help police excel in fulfilling their mission to protect and serve.

Protests are happening across the nation and around the world. Protesters are demanding police treat people who are Black more fairly and end this pandemic of unarmed Black people dying while in police custody. We at NASW know social workers will play a vital role in helping law enforcement better serve their communities; the social work profession can help our nation achieve better public safety outcomes.

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