

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



In 2023, we advanced **legislative and policy change that will bring more social workers into the field and address systemic barriers to entry.** One way we did this was by surveying our members and then filing a bill to remove the standardized test at the LCSW level, provide funding for student placements, and lessen barriers to supervision experienced by LICSWs. An Act Relative to Social Work Uplifting Practices and Exam Removal (S.160/H.1253), known as the SUPER Act, would take on each of these issues and address the crisis of access to services in Massachusetts.

In addition to the SUPER Act, WBUR covered a legislative briefing that we organized with coalition allies on an *Act Relative to Treatment, Not Imprisonment* and then in December the Boston Globe editorialized for its passage. Earlier in the year, WBUR included our viewpoint on community-based responses to 911 calls. The Globe and Boston Public Radio spoke with us about the rollout of the state's behavioral health helpline and the workforce shortage.

Over the course of the year, we also prioritized legislation to lift kids out of deep poverty, legislation to provide school meals for all, and the Healthy Youth Act. Once again, we were successful in securing \$50,000 in state funding to support our free Therapy Matcher program, connecting consumers to LICSWs in our network.

Programmatically, we offered all of **our 1.5 CE webinars FREE all fall long as a thank you to our members.** And Symposium 2023 was one of our most popular events all year with over 750 attendees across Massachusetts and Rhode Island and beyond.

You can see what else we accomplished together throughout this annual report. All of this work is possible because of your membership in NASW-MA!

In Solidarity,
Rebekah



**2023
BY THE NUMBERS**

111

graduation cords distributed to **graduating social work** student and faculty members.

6

social workers running for office endorsed by our political arm, NASW-MA PACE. **Five of them won!**

50+

social workers testified or provided written testimony in support of our legislative priorities.

22

timely action opportunities sent to our **Legislative Alert Network.**

121

new **therapy matcher** members.

800+

social workers assisted with **exam prep**

15.5

free continuing education opportunities for members

**SOCIAL WORK
BREAKS BARRIERS**

Advocacy Spotlight

The SUPER Act (S.160/H.1253)

On May 16, we held a legislative briefing where social workers, legislators, and their staff showed up in support of our top priority bill. So much energy was generated at the State House and attention was raised around critical issues like the behavioral health workforce shortage in our state. On June 27, we attended a hearing for the SUPER Act, where **dozens of social workers testified in support** in person, virtually, and through written testimony. On October 4, we held a mini lobby day - which turned into **the largest lobby day ever for our chapter** - in the middle of the day where social workers made the time to show up once again and raise their voices in support of the bill (*picture on front page of this report*).



Universal Free School Meals

The Universal Free School Meals **law ensures that every student in MA public schools receives free breakfast and lunch.** During the pandemic, federal relief funds covered the costs of providing meals. Since 2021, the Feed Kids Coalition, of which NASW-MA is a member, advocated for the passage of the Universal Free School Meals law while securing one-year extensions of the free meals policy. In passing the law in 2023, **MA became the eighth state in the country to make the free meals program permanent.**

New Sex-Ed Frameworks

In 2023, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education **made major updates to the state's sex and relationship education frameworks - the first in 20 years.** NASW-MA built on these updates by continuing to advocate for passage of the Healthy Youth Act, which would require that high-quality sexuality and relationship education that is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences can be taught in MA public schools.

FY 24 Budget Wins

In the state's Fiscal Year 2024 budget we worked in coalitions and independently to secure:

- \$50k for NASW-MA's Therapy Matcher Program, a free public service that connects people with LICSW providers.
- 10% grant increase for cash assistance grants effective in April 2024
- Universal Free School Meals becoming a permanent program in Massachusetts
- \$200 million in Behavioral Health Trust Fund monies including all of our recommendations on how the funds should be spent.

SOLVE HUNGER.

SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL.



Membership

We conducted two membership surveys, one to find out the various identities of our members and another to find out why our members join and thereby continue to be the driving force of our organization.

Over the course of this year we checked-in with members after they joined to see how their experience was and to determine if there were more and better ways we could connect them with resources.

We have also been able to engage social workers in several advocacy efforts with our new “Social Workers Interested in Advocacy” form. Here, social workers select what priority bills of ours matter to them most and ways they would like to help. This is important because when social workers come together to push for change, we are powerful.

In 2024, we look forward to implementing even more of your feedback to provide the best member experience we can for each and every member of NASW-MA.



Chapter Awards 2023



On October 26th we gathered to celebrate five honorees who contribute to the field of social work in significant and life-changing ways. Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW, LICSW was presented with the Greatest Contribution To Social Work Award. Rebecca Jackson, MSW was presented with the Beverly Ross Fliegel Social Policy & Change Award. Gordon Donkoh-Halm was presented with the Public Citizen Of The Year Award. Norma Wassel, LICSW was presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award. And Marie Mathieu, MSW, LICSW was presented with the Emerging Leader Award.

OUR MISSION

National Association of Social Workers – MA Chapter is a membership association that advances professional social work practice throughout the Commonwealth and advocates for equity and justice for all people.

Continuing Education

Chapter Staff

Rebekah Gewirtz, MPA
Executive Director

Barbara Burka, LICSW
**Director of Therapy Matcher and
Director of Clinical Practice**

Brianna Silva, MSW
Membership & Advocacy Manager

Adam Linn
Administrative Manager

Crisbelly Medina Adames, MBA
Program Manager

Beth Morrison, LCSW
**Political Action Manager
Northeast and Central Regional Coordinator**

Melissa B. Dawson, LICSW
Southeast Region Coordinator

Jeff Schrenzel, PhD
Western MA Coordinator

Chapter Board

Yvonne Ruiz, PhD, LICSW, **President**

Kevin McCarthy, LICSW,
Vice President of Budget and Finance

Sandra Bailly
Vice President of Membership & Diversity

Mary Byrne, LICSW, **Secretary**

Izzy Lopes, MPH, MSW, **At-large**

Phanide Simon Ulysse, LICSW, **At-large**

Bill Fisher, PhD, **Berkshire Region**

Carla B. Monteiro, LICSW, **Greater Boston
Region**

Scune Carrington, LICSW, **Greater Boston
Region**

Jorge Delva, MSW, PhD, **Greater Boston
Region**

Emily Swalec, LICSW, **Central Region**

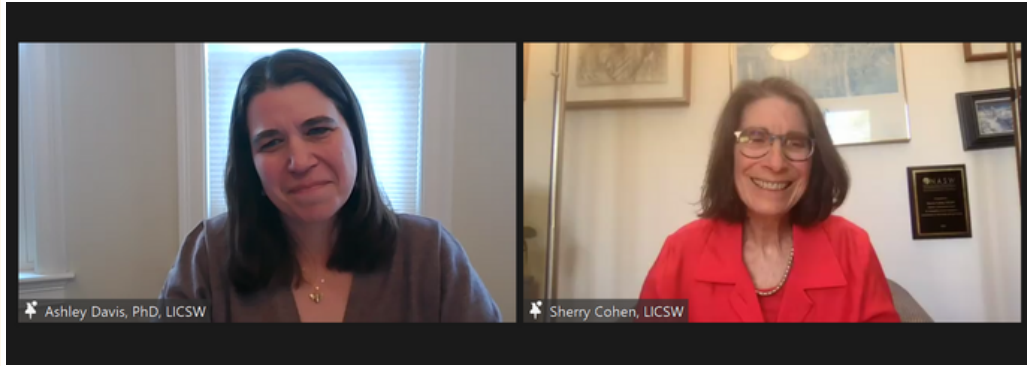
Jennifer Blewett, LICSW, MSW, **Northeast
Region**

Tony Hill, MSW, PhD, **Pioneer Valley Region**

Domingas Lopes, BSW, **Southeast Region**

Kathryn Janiuk, MSW(c), **MSW Student
Representative**

Gabby Branco, BSW(c), **BSW Student
Representative**



Symposium 2023

Social Workers Persist: Global Problems Demand Local Solutions.

This two-day annual event drew over 750 participants, making it the largest gathering of social workers in New England. Symposium featured both live and on-demand workshops for the first time ever. Participants attended over 50 workshops covering all aspects of social work practice and had opportunities to connect with experts in the field. Keynote speaker Mojdeh Rohani, LICSW presented “After The Cameras Are Gone: The Global Refugee Crisis And Social Work’s Critical Role.” The panel discussion with Hugo Kamy, LICSW, PhD, Gladys Vega, Jason Giannetti, and Nicole Dubus, LCSW, PhD focused on systemic barriers to successful resettlement or repatriation and the role of social work.

MLK Jr. Forum on Racial Justice: The Disproportionate Impact of the Mental Health Crisis on Communities of Color

We hosted our 9th annual MLK Forum on Racial Justice during March where speakers discussed the inequities in access to mental health services and barriers to care facing Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. A panel of experts, moderated by Melissa Dagher, LICSW of the Codman Square Health Center, highlighted strategies for engaging in advocacy to address this crisis. Panelists also discussed approaches to addressing inequities in the provision of services and the role of implicit biases in feeding structural inequities.

Nursing Home Conference

The theme of the 2023 conference was “Value of the Social Worker: Frustration, Benefit, Hope.”

Participants learned how state and national organizations advocate on behalf of older adults (especially in nursing homes); gained information about community organizations that provide older adult services, the potential impact on their clients, and how to refer and work with them; and learned about the strengths and challenges for nursing home social workers and how to engage in an effort to improve and regulate their presence.