Position Statement on Gun Violence Legislation in Massachusetts

NASW MA Chapter is committed to ensuring Massachusetts gun laws promote the safety and security of all members of our communities. As such, the Chapter is working in coalition on relevant public safety legislation that would curb gun violence. This is a complex issue. The Chapter recognizes that violence in our society goes beyond gun possession and licensing of firearms. We will remain cognizant of this as we work on details of current legislation.

Social workers understand that people with mental illness are not more likely to be violent than other individuals. Indeed, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), people with mental illness are eleven times more likely to be the victims of violent crime. Adding those who have been treated for any level of mental illness to the list of people requiring background checks perpetuates the stigma associated with mental illness and will not solve the problem. The Chapter takes the following position on gun control legislation in the Commonwealth:

1) Legislation must focus on taking guns out of the hands of those who would harm others, rather than focusing on those with a history of mental illness.
2) Legislation must not further stigmatize the mentally ill or exacerbate existing stigma.
3) Behavioral health providers should not be required to release mental health records to licensing authorities, creating unintended consequences such as:
   a. Deterring individuals or families from seeking mental health treatment for fear that they will have to report their treatment to an authority later; or that they will be involuntarily reported without their consent.
   b. Deterring law enforcement or military personnel who require guns for their employment from seeking mental health treatment.

NASW MA Chapter looks forward to continuing our work with allies in the legislature to make our Commonwealth safe for every resident.

For questions on the NASW MA Chapter position on gun violence legislation, please be in touch with Rebekah Gewirtz, Director of Government Relations and Political Action at 617-227-9635 x12 or gewirtz@naswma.org. Please also see the front page of the February 2013 NASW FOCUS newsletter for more on the Newtown tragedy and coping with our shared grief.