EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

Thanks for Your Membership

We started 2021 with a new 18-month strategic plan and a new legislative agenda in hand. Both of these documents have been essential in guiding our work this year, as we have continued to work remotely and virtually. A major outcome of our strategic planning process was the modification of our mission statement, something that hadn’t been adapted for many years. We made our mission more concise to center the crux of our work: advancing the social work profession and advocating for equity and justice for all people in Massachusetts. You can read more about our work to advance our 2021–2022 legislative priorities, which have helped us meet our mission, on page 2 of this report.

As has been tradition of the last few years, we kicked off the new year with our annual MLK Forum on Racial Justice, which focused on what it means to be an anti-racist social work practitioner. We then turned our attention to March, which is always busy with activities related to Social Work Month and our annual Legislative Education and Advocacy Day (LEAD). Hundreds of you attended free programming throughout Social Work Month and hundreds of social work students joined together during LEAD to advocate for social work priority bills.

Symposium 2021: Voices of Empowerment and Justice in April was also a highlight for me this year. After having to cancel Symposium 2020 due to the pandemic, this was the first time our staff and Symposium Planning Committee members pulled off an entirely virtual two-day conference attended by hundreds of social workers, a truly incredible feat. Symposium 2021 also marked the start of making Symposium an annual event, as opposed to biennial. We hope the new frequency of this event helps you better satisfy the continuing education requirements for your license renewal.

Speaking of licensing renewal, we hope you received our communications about the new continuing education requirement for social workers to earn CEUs related to anti-racism and anti-discrimination each licensing period. When the state licensing board passed this new regulation in September, we quickly pulled together an FAQ and began sharing this news through every platform we have available to us. Without NASW-MA’s work on this, many social workers would likely be caught off guard when it comes time to renew in 2022.

I’m really proud of all that we accomplished in 2021, but none of it could be possible without our incredible staff and interns, you—our members, and especially the many members who volunteer your time, effort, and solidarity in our shared work together.

Thank you for your membership.

With gratitude,

Rebekah Gewirtz, MPA, Executive Director

By the Numbers

In 2021, we:

- Initiated a sign-on letter to the legislature’s Health Care Financing Committee with the names of 300 social workers urging the Committee to take action on the Common Apps bill to close the SNAP Gap, which they did
- Distributed more than 130 graduation cords to graduating social work student and faculty members
- Provided 56 membership scholarships to BIPOC social work students, with the financial support of many of you
- Hosted over 50 virtual continuing education events, each worth at least 1.5 CEUs
- NASW-MA PACE, our political arm, endorsed 10 social workers running for local office, six of whom won their elections
- Sent 15 timely action opportunities to our Legislative Alert Network
- Hosted 7 free events for social workers throughout March in honor of Social Work Month
- Published 6 statements, reports, op-eds, and letters to the editor

OUR MISSION: National Association of Social Workers—Massachusetts Chapter is a membership association that advances professional social work practice throughout the Commonwealth and advocates for equity and justice for all people.
Legislative Advocacy

The current state legislative session began in January 2021. Our 2021–2022 Legislative Agenda includes 11 bill priorities focused on professional practice, health and mental health, criminal justice, economic justice, education, and immigrant rights:

**An Act to Define Clinical Social Work Practice**
would comprehensively define clinical social work practice in statute to prevent the licensing board from denying masters-level social workers from sitting for the LICSW exam for arbitrary reasons. This bill language was also included in the Mental Health ABC Act 2.0 which would broadly address access to mental and behavioral health care.

**An Act Relative to Treatment Not Imprisonment**
would prevent the reincarceration of people who relapse while on pretrial release or probation if they are otherwise committed to and consistently attending treatment. This bill was inspired by the client of an NASW-MA member.

**An Act to Promote Public Safety and Better Outcomes for Young Adults**
would gradually raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18- to 20-year-olds in order to reduce recidivism. Massachusetts last raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction in 2013 to include 17-year olds, leading to a 51% reduction in juvenile crime rates.

**An Act Establishing a Jail and Prison Construction Moratorium**
would establish a five-year moratorium on new prison and jail construction and expansion in Massachusetts.

**Alternatives for Community Emergency Services Act**, known as the “ACES Act,” would create a local option for crisis response that is separate from law enforcement to ensure that every call for help gets the best response. We have led on this bill since its inception, including facilitating the 25-organization coalition backing the bill and publishing a letter to the editor with the Greater Boston Association of Black Social Workers in the Boston Globe in October.

**An Act to Prioritize Violence Prevention and Social Emotional Health in School Support Staffing**
would establish a ratio of school resource officers (SROs) to mental and social-emotional health support personnel, including social workers, in public schools so that if a district chooses to have SRO(s), there must at least seven social-emotional support personnel for every SRO. We worked with Senator Chang-Diaz to help bring social worker Representative Fluker Oakley on as a lead House sponsor.

**An Act to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty**
would support our lowest income children and families by setting a floor for cash assistance benefits at 50% of the federal poverty level. The bill builds off of historic grant increases included in the FY21 and FY22 state budgets, which NASW-MA helped to secure.
Membership

Social Work Month: Social Workers are Essential

March 2021 marked the one-year point of the COVID-19 pandemic. After such a challenging year, we worked to make sure Social Work Month was extra special. We offered a mixture of free continuing education programming focused on self-care and opportunities for community and joy. The continuing education programming included webinars focused on dispelling the myth of the infinitely-resourced caregiver and compassion fatigue and a book club discussion of The Body Keeps Score. Other programming included a mindfulness event and an exercise class.

Celebrating Social Workers and Allies

On December 16, 2021, we hosted our 48th Annual Awards Celebration, honoring the incredible contributions of five social workers and allies. The event kicked off with a special and warm welcome from NASW President Mit Joyner. During the event we recognized Helene Kress with the Lifetime Achievement Award, Sara McCabe with the Beverly Ross Fliegel Greatest Contribution to Social Policy and Change Award, Milly Arbaje-Thomas with the Greatest Contribution to Social Work Award, Beckey Rowe with the Emerging Leader Award, and Keith Mascoll with the Public Citizen of the Year Award. It was a beautiful event that included a moving and impromptu spoken word performance by honoree Keith Mascoll.

An Act to Streamline Access to Critical Public Health and Safety-net Programs through Common Applications would create an online common application for MassHealth/Medicare Savings Program and SNAP. The bill would also allow SNAP recipients to apply for cash assistance benefits while laying the foundation for a universal application for other needs-based programs. We co-chair the 150-organization coalition behind this bill, securing $5M in the state’s IT Bond Bill in January to support the campaign’s aims, publishing a letter to the editor in the Boston Globe in June, getting language included in the state’s FY22 budget in July, organizing a letter signed by 300 social workers in November, and jointly authoring a data brief highlighting the campaign in December.

An Act Relative to Universal Free School Meals would make USDA reimbursable meals free for all students, allowing every student to access the nutrition they need during the school day. In December, in coordination with Project Bread, we organized 200 social workers to sign-on to a letter in support of the campaign.

An Act Relative to Healthy Youth would require schools districts that provide sex and relationship education to utilize curricula that are comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate, and LGBTQ-inclusive. We organized a successful digital Week of Advocacy in April.

An Act Relative to Work and Family Mobility would enable all qualified state residents to apply for a standard Massachusetts driver’s license, regardless of immigrant status, while keeping our Commonwealth in full compliance with REAL ID requirements. In addition to our legislative advocacy, we secured $50,000 in funding for Therapy Matcher through our FY22 state budget advocacy which is enabling us to bring new social workers into our network for personalized referrals at a greatly reduced membership fee.
Continuing Education

MLK Forum on Racial Justice: Anti-racist Social Work Practice

In January, we hosted our 7th Annual MLK Forum on Racial Justice where we discussed what it means to be an anti-racist social work practitioner. The MLK Forum on Racial Justice is always a free continuing education program for all social workers. The 2021 event was moderated by Dr. Rob Eschmann and featured Dr. Robbie Tourse, Dr. Judith Willison, Rebecca Jackson, and Felicia Kanu. The event was attended by hundreds of social workers.

Symposium 2021: Voices of Empowerment and Social Justice

After a pandemic break in 2020, Symposium was held in a virtual format in spring 2021, and was extremely well-received by attendees and presenters. This two-day event was attended by nearly 700 people, making it the largest gathering of social workers in New England. The program featured more than 80 workshops covering topics spanning all areas of social work, and included a poster session featuring MSW students. The keynote was delivered by social worker and nationally recognized speaker Dr. Joy DeGruy who gave an inspiring talk about her conception of “Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing.” Based on the overwhelmingly positive response, we brought Dr. DeGruy back for a well-received webinar in September.

School Social Work Conference: Anti-racist Practice Principles for School Social Workers

Social workers and adjustment counselors from across Massachusetts joined us for our Annual School Social Work Conference in October featuring keynote speaker Kathy Lopes, LICSW, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Newton Public Schools. Kathy’s well-received keynote ranged from sharing her experience as a Black girl growing up in a predominantly white Massachusetts community, to working as a school social worker in Washington, DC, to spearheading efforts within Newton Public Schools to center DEI.

Webinars

Collectively, our Chapter staff and regional staff hosted more than 35 webinars, each worth at least 1.5 CEUs, bringing you topical and affordable continuing education programming covering everything from self-care for social workers to trauma and addiction to disability cultural competence and much more. One of our most popular offerings was a series of three webinars offered in partnership with the Greater Boston Association of Black Social Workers titled “Clinicians of Color CAN Private Practice.” The series was designed to help clinicians of color start their own private practices. We even hosted several book club and film discussions, reading books like The Great Alone and Dare to Lead and discussing movies, both classic and newer releases, such as When a Man Loves a Woman and The Last Black Man in San Francisco.