"The greatest nations are defined by how they treat their weakest inhabitants."
Attributed to Jorge Ramos

August 30th, 2022

New York City is once again navigating another human rights crisis. This current crisis, while multi-layered and historical, is lit by hate, fueled by xenophobia, and fed by unchecked abuses of power. It is the result of the governors of Texas and Arizona putting displaced, often victimized, and already traumatized people seeking refuge, on buses and dropping them off in NYC, with what appears to be a complete disregard for their humanity, sanitary needs, and overall well-being.

A collection of National Association of Social Workers (NASW) chapters are deeply concerned at this ongoing human rights crisis regarding immigration debates, asylum seekers, and refugees. We call upon the Federal Government to prioritize a humane immigration policy and are shocked that elected leaders in states like Texas and Arizona have been busing people seeking asylum to New York City and the D.C. metro area. These behaviors run counter to social work values and display a complete disregard for the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, rising costs due to inflation, deficiencies and underfunding of mental health services, rise in people who are unhoused, and the rising Monkeypox and Polio epidemics. We are even more concerned that states are sending people without any formal supports in place once they arrive. While the social work community certainly understands that immigration is a complex issue and requires many resources and organizations working together to provide a more supportive response, we must call out the disregard for basic human decorum with regards to honoring the dignity and worth of the individuals seeking sanctuary and opportunities for themselves and their families in the United States. People do not generally flee or leave their countries, their land of origin, their culture, their language, their family, their friends; and go to an unknown country without desperation or deep consideration of the risks. Throughout history, people have always migrated for survival and the hope for opportunities that may afford them and their families an enhanced quality of life. Some are fleeing wars, famine, political unrest, religious persecution, gender based discrimination, poverty, and life threatening situations. Those seeking help should not be placed in unsafe situations for political reasons. We hear reports of horrors and abuses in immigrant camps, sexual assaults, children separated from their parents, and people dying. In early July, we learned of the horrible death of 53 people who were in left in the back of a truck in Texas. When will enough be enough?

NASW chapters and the social work community are angry. We are angry that some politicians continue to use human beings as political pawns, rather than consider the actual humans involved in their political games. We are angry that these political stunts are done without regard for the needs of those involved, their families, their emotional and physical well-being, and their basic right to safety. NYC Mayor Adams and his administration have been vocal regarding their concerns and the practice of sending people to NYC without consideration for their humanity. Immigration is complex, and we acknowledge that many governments are speaking to the financial impact, strain on social services, and lack of resources; yet, as President John F. Kennedy once said, "every aspect of the American economy has profited from the contributions of immigrants."

We also recognize that the children who are part of this ploy will be harmed and traumatized too. We must not use a politics over people approach to further divide the country, and we certainly should never use people as political stunts -- children are people too. President Obama once said "A child on the other side of the border is no less worthy of love and compassion than my own child." The trauma, harm, and unnecessary severe emotional distress all connect to adverse childhood experiences, which are shown to have negative and lifelong consequences.

Our response to this and other human rights violations must center the worth and dignity of each individual and family. As a society, we should not be making these challenges even more difficult for people who are already facing difficult circumstances. NASW chapters are calling for policies to protect asylum seekers from harmful
transportation, as well as processing guidelines that are fair, equitable, and less cumbersome. We call for social services and government leaders to work in partnership to address immigration needs, rather than the current response that is framed by xenophobia, supremacy culture, and inhumane treatment.

Our NASW chapters call for the immediate end to the traumatic and racist behaviors that Texas, Arizona, and any other Jurisdiction have engaged in. We also hold NYC leaders responsible for ensuring the safety and dignity of those who may arrive. We call for the immediate oversight of these practices by a joint commission, and that the politicians using people for political stunts be held accountable.

We ask that these states and individuals who were elected to lead, put politics, personal biases, and party lines aside and agree to partner with NYC agencies and municipalities to ensure the safety, wellbeing and humanity of those involved. While there is always work to be done, we appreciate the recent announcement by NYC government to engage efforts to support the educational needs of asylum seekers through Project Open Arms.

Our NASW chapters will continue to advocate and work in solidarity with all those who are victimized and displaced. We refuse to remain silent as we bear witness to the impacts of xenophobia. Disregarding humans, and sending people away without consideration to their safety, health, and overall wellness is dangerous. Refusing to collaborate with organizers and city leaders who are on the receiving end of these dangerous acts is callous at best, and a crime against humanity at worst.

For the NASW-NYC chapter, this issue is both personal and professional. Dr. Claire Green-Forde, LCSW, Executive Director of the Chapter, is an immigrant, caught between two worlds and realities. It is part of her core and intersectional identity. It is who she is. The NASW Code of Ethics calls for us to advocate for those who are marginalized and oppressed. We leave you with the words of President Barack Obama, "My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too."

For ways to get involved and learn more:

- Join NASW-NYC’s Immigration and Global Social Work committee and visit NASW-NYC’s Committees
- Join or renew your NASW-NYC membership to support our advocacy efforts
- To learn more about humanizing the immigrant narrative

In Solidarity and in Partnership,

NASW-NYC           NASW-Texas            NASW-Arizona