

NASW, Tennessee Chapter 2020 Legislative Issues-Draft

NASW, Tennessee Chapter is pleased to share the below draft of our State Legislative Priorities. The Legislative Priorities will be finalized after The Tennessee General Assembly's bill filing deadlines the first week in February. NASW-TN invites you to monitor the Chapter website at www.naswtn.com to keep informed on ways to be involved in supporting these important issues. Regular legislative updates will be emailed to NASW-TN members and shared with key University contacts partnering with NASW-TN on Social Work Day on the Hill. For additional information please contact the Chapter Office and make plans to join your colleagues at Social Work Day on the Hill on Tuesday, March 24th in Nashville.

Active Priority Issues

➤ **Social Workers: Generations Strong**

Our 2020 Social Work Month theme, ***Social Work: Generations Strong***, highlights the fact that social workers have been working for generations to improve the lives of Tennesseans. Social work is a profession that allows people across many generations to make a profound, positive impact on the lives of thousands of Tennesseans each and every day. You will find social workers from The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers to Generation Z who are doing the hard, often unsung work to make our state a better place. We will work in 2020 to help our decision-makers understand that they can find social workers everywhere throughout Tennessee - including in schools and colleges, hospitals, veteran centers, mental health facilities, local and federal government, the corporate world and in agencies that protect children from abuse and neglect and that help children find new families through foster care and adoption. We will also help decision-makers know how they can support our efforts.

➤ **Modernizing HIV Criminal Laws In Tennessee**

NASW-TN accepts the definition of HIV Criminalization as the arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment of people living with HIV (PLHIV) for things that are legal or only minor crimes for people who have not tested positive. We support work to modernize Tennessee's HIV criminal laws in a manner that is based upon empirical research and that promotes public health and fairness.

➤ **Preserving Tennessee's Social Infrastructure**

Tennessee's social infrastructure, made up largely of public/private partnerships and federal/state and local partnerships, has been strengthened and refined over the last 3 or 4 decades with bipartisan leadership of governors, legislators and citizens. TANF (Families First) and other state and federal public benefits are important components of this social infrastructure. NASW-TN will continue to work with others to preserve and strengthen Tennessee's important social infrastructure with an emphasis on enabling children and families to achieve long-term stability.

➤ **Promoting Available and Appropriate Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services**

NASW is committed to enhancing the well-being of people living with mental health and substance abuse conditions and in working towards increased access to appropriate services and interventions. The need for access to appropriate services and interventions is of particular concern as Tennessee continues to address the Opioid Epidemic. NASW-TN's efforts will include working collaboratively with other consumer and professional groups including the Tennessee Coalition on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Tennessee Pre-Arrest Diversion Coalition and the Tennessee Association of Mental Health Organizations. We will also work with the TASMIE coalition on legislation to exclude individuals with severe mental illness from the death penalty.

➤ **Supporting Inclusion and Opportunities for All**

NASW-TN supports an inclusive society that provides opportunities for all and in which racial, ethnic, social, sexual orientation, and gender differences and identities are valued and respected. NASW-TN opposes legislation that discriminates on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability.

➤ **Strengthening School Mental Health Services Including Increasing the Number of School Social Workers**

NASW, Tennessee Chapter applauds the Tennessee Department of Education's focus in the [Best for All](#) plan on addressing the needs of the **Whole Child**. We appreciate the 2018 Tennessee General Assembly passing legislation that established a collaborative coordinated by the Tennessee Department of Education to:

- Review and refine the roles of school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses,
- Identify ways these professionals can collaborate to provide high quality support to students, and
- Identify resources to support these efforts.

NASW-TN is concerned that 2018 data continues to reflect that almost 43% of Tennessee's school districts do not employ school social workers. We will continue to advocate the importance of increasing the number of school social workers as this structural deficit limits access to professionals that have demonstrated their ability to drive student success in other schools.

Partnership Issues

(NASW-TN will work with other organizations in monitoring these issues. Our legislative work on these issues may increase if we need to play a strategic role in these areas.)

Adoption and Foster Care

NASW believes that every child has a right to a permanent, continuous, and nurturing relationship with a parenting person or people who convey to the child an enduring sense of love and care. We believe public social policy on adoption and foster care should be evidenced-based and focus on the best interests of the child. NASW-TN will work with others to educate policy makers about evidenced-based practice in the area of foster care and adoption.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Social workers know that trauma during childhood can have critical implications throughout the lifespan. NASW-TN applauds the Building Strong Brains initiative and our statewide efforts to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their impact on local communities. We will continue to support efforts to raise community awareness about the effects of adverse childhood experiences and to develop and implement strategies that will effectively prevent or counter ACEs.

Child Care and Early Childhood Education

NASW recognizes that all young children deserve excellent early care and education and those high quality early experiences make a difference in children's lifelong academic and social success. The Tennessee Chapter of NASW will continue to work with other groups to support continuation and expansion of funding for Pre-K classrooms. We also recognize the important role family and environmental factors play in educational development and advocate the involvement of social work professionals in early education programs.

Department of Children's Services

The Tennessee Chapter recognizes the important work of the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. NASW-TN will work with them to support the professionalism of the child welfare workforce and on initiatives to improve the lives and protection of Tennessee's children.

Environmental Justice

NASW applauds the [Grand Challenges for Social Work](#) recognition that "the environmental challenges reshaping contemporary societies pose profound risks to human well-being, particularly for marginalized communities." NASW-TN will join with others in supporting policies that will reduce environmental threats to vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.

Ensuring Health Care Coverage for Tennesseans, Including Our Most Vulnerable

Access to health care is a critical issue for Tennesseans and for the Tennessee Chapter of NASW. We recognize the importance of:

- TennCare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act in providing health care coverage for our state's children, families, veterans, the elderly and persons with behavioral and other medical challenges,
- Understanding and addressing medical debt and its impact on the prosperity and health of Tennesseans,
- Federally qualified and faith based health centers in providing primary care, and
- The Coordinated School Health Program in improving student health outcomes and supporting the connection between good health practices, academic achievement, and lifetime wellness.

Changes to any of the above programs, including Tennessee's Medicaid Block Grant Waiver Proposal should be implemented with an emphasis on maintaining and expanding coverage for children, persons with pre-existing conditions and others in need of health care. We must also recognize the cost of gaps in health care coverage on Tennessee communities, especially our rural areas.

Homelessness

NASW supports the development of comprehensive systems of services and supports for the homeless. We also prioritize services to homeless children, youth and young adults with the goal of ending the cycle of homelessness. We appreciate the Tennessee General Assembly's support of legislation to in 2018 and 2019 to address the needs of homeless children and youth.

Human Trafficking

Modern slavery and human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal industries and one of the biggest human rights crises today. NASW-TN commends the response of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and Tennessee General Assembly in addressing human trafficking in collaboration with local government and nonprofits. We are impressed with the State being ranked among the best in the nation when it comes to handling human trafficking cases. We continue to support on-going public awareness and action to address human trafficking and slavery in Tennessee.

People With Disabilities

NASW-TN will work collaboratively with the Tennessee Disability Coalition, Disability Rights Tennessee and other disability groups on budget and policy issues that ensure the rights of people with disabilities to participate fully and equitably in society, with appropriate supports to meet individual needs.

Refugee and Immigrant Issues

At a national and Chapter level NASW supports immigration and refugee policies that uphold and support equity and human rights, while protecting national security. As professional social workers we are committed to helping our lawmakers and others understand how immigrants and refugees contribute to our communities so that public policies are designed in an environment of mutual respect.

Reproductive Rights

NASW-TN will track legislation related to reproductive rights and update members when key actions are being considered.

Revenue to Provide Crucial Services

Tennessee's tax system provides crucial revenue for services in Tennessee communities. We support efforts to ensure the availability of long-term revenue needed to enhance Tennessee's progress.

Safety

Family violence, school violence, child abuse and gun violence are unfortunately part of our society. Tennessee's social workers intervene and respond to these and other situations regularly. We urge Tennessee's legislative leaders to turn to social workers for crucial information, including information on evidenced based practices, as you develop policies to address violence in our families and communities.

Seniors

NASW-TN recognizes the crucial efforts of social workers in serving Tennessee's growing senior population. We support dignified, humane, effective and client-based services for seniors that are consistent with social work values.

Service Members and Veterans

NASW is committed to supporting the health and well-being of our nation's service members, veterans, and their families. We will work with others to ensure benefits are available that recognize the important contributions and needs of these residents.

Voter Rights

NASW and social workers have long supported ensuring that disenfranchised populations have the right to vote. We will continue our work on voter rights, and will also join with others in celebrating in 2020 the Centennial of women's suffrage and Tennessee key role in passing the 19th Amendment.

Web Resources for Tennessee Families

NASW-TN has partnered with the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) for many years to ensure web resources are available to assist Tennessee families. We will continue to work jointly with TALS to help public officials understand how social services and legal information can jointly assist their constituents. NASW-TN also commends Tennessee's outstanding work to make easy to understand information available for families through www.kidcentraltn.com.

Women's Health

NASW-TN supports equal and affordable access to comprehensive women's healthcare and will work with legislative and regulatory bodies to develop and implement policies that advance women's health in Tennessee.

Additional Monitoring & Information Dissemination Issues

Death Penalty

NASW advocates the abolition of the death penalty as this punishment is at variance with social work values. NASW-TN is committed to monitoring this issue and keeping our members informed of developments in Tennessee's death penalty system.

Management Data

The Tennessee Chapter of NASW knows the utilization of good data can improve public policy management decisions. We support the development of strong data systems for evaluating and improving the delivery of services to our most vulnerable populations.

Transportation

NASW-TN will monitor efforts to increase funding for mass transit and other transportation options that increase accessibility for low income and vulnerable populations.