Advocacy is part of the Social Work Code of Ethics. As social workers, we have an obligation to champion policies that improve the lives of our clients. With that in mind, NASW-Texas put together this guide to getting involved!
Let's start here...

Find out who represents you

Who represents me?

When is the next local, state or federal election?

Vote 411
Election information you need

Stay informed!

LWV
League of Women Voters

NASW (National Association of Social Workers) Texas Chapter
NOW, LET'S TALK ABOUT THE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

- Federal
- State
- Local

WE NEED SOCIAL WORKERS INVOLVED AT EVERY LEVEL!
FEDERAL, STATE, & LOCAL

https://www.mckinneytexas.org/1086/Legislative-Priorities
There are two major kinds of local governments: **MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY.**

In general, mayors, city councils, and other governing bodies are directly elected **BY THE PEOPLE**

Municipalities/ Cities govern things such as:
- parks, recreation services, police,
- fire departments, housing services,
- emergency medical services, municipal courts
- transportation services, & public work.

(you can find the comprehensive list with examples here)
THE MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEXAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Providing **public safety and justice**
Holding **elections** at every level of government
Maintaining Texans’ most **important records**
Building and **maintaining roads, bridges** and in some cases, **county airports**
Providing **emergency management services**
Providing **health and safety services**
Collecting **property taxes** for the county and sometimes for other taxing entities
Issuing **vehicle registration** and transfers & **Registering voters**

Most Populated Texas County Governments:

- **Travis County Government**
- **Bexar County Government**
- **Harris County Government**
- **El Paso County Government**
- **Dallas County Government**
- **Tarrant County Government** *

*More info at the end of the toolkit.
LOCAL LEVEL ADVOCACY: GETTING STARTED

Don’t know where to start?

1. Look at the official county or city websites, find who your officials are: Mayor, City Council, etc.
2. Look for upcoming opportunities to engage with them: town halls, meetings, virtual events, etc.
3. Search for existing groups and coalitions, get creative! They may be on Facebook or part of existing social clubs or political groups.
4. Do some research! What Issues mean the most to you & what organizations or elected officials are working to solve these Issues?
5. You know your community, so share your thoughts with your elected officials! Start building a relationship before you have an "ask".
6. Ask to set up a call or meeting to introduce yourself and share your interests.
Texas Legislature Fast Facts

The Governor is chosen by popular vote by the Texas public.

The Texas Legislature is divided by two chambers: Senate and House

**150 Representatives**
- (2-year term)
- The Texas House of Representatives is run by the Speaker of the House, who is chosen by House members.

**31 Senators**
- (4-year term)
- The presiding officer of the Senate is the Lieutenant Governor, who is chosen by popular vote by the Texas public.

The off time from a legislative session is called “the interim”.

An average of 10,000 bills are filed with only 4,500 passing.
Bills can be vetoed by the Governor even if passed by the Legislature.

Texas meets for the Legislative Session every other year on odd numbered years for 140 days. Only the Governor may call a Special Session to bring the legislature back into session once session has ended.

Legislators have Capitol offices and District offices, so you can advocate from any area of the state!
The Texas Legislature: What YOU Need to Know to be an Effective Advocate

Brief Legislative Timeline

- **January 8th**: Legislature convenes for 140 days of session
- **March 8th**: Bill filing deadline
- **May 27th**: Sine Die End of session
- **June 16th**: Last day Gov. can sign or veto bills
- **September 1st**: Bills with this effective date become law

*This is an example only. Dates differ each session. Click the calendar icon below for this session's timeline.*
State Level Advocacy: Meeting with a Legislator

1. Find your legislators and their contact information by searching "Who Represents Me?"

2. Learn about your legislators
   - Know basic information about the Representative or Senator:
     - Where are they from? What committees are they on?
     - Have they worked on any legislation related to the topic you are interested in?

3. Call and ask to schedule a meeting
   - Hi, my name is _____ and I am a constituent in your district, as well as a *social work student/social work professional*. Can I please set up a brief visit with the legislator or their staff to discuss policy issues important to social workers?

4. Prepare for your meeting
   - i. Have your "Ask" - Determine 1-2 issues that you are especially passionate about (i.e. school social work, health coverage, or immigration)
   - ii. Know your “Why” - Review the one-pagers to learn more about your chosen issues. Reflect on how the issue relates to social work and why you care about the issue. If time allows, use the meeting to share those thoughts with the legislator or their staff.
   - iii. Based on your “Ask” and your “Why”, have your “Elevator Speech” ready.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

1. Bring your social work skills to the conversation: advocate for yourself and your cause. Authenticity is KEY!
2. Legislative staff need your perspective and expertise more than you think. Bring that expertise to the meeting!
3. Admit if you don’t know the answer to a question a legislator or staff ask.
4. Even if you don’t agree with the legislator on all issues, find one item that you can thank them for during the meeting.
5. Send a follow up thank you email letting the staffer or legislator know you appreciate their time and want to be a resource for them in the future.
What's an Elevator Speech & when do I use it?

An Elevator Speech is a quick, clear, and concise summary of the issue you are hoping to address and how you would like to address it. It is an effective advocacy tool during calls, meetings, and testimony.

Example Elevator Speech on School Social Work:

**Intro:** I am a constituent in your district, as well as a social work student/licensed social worker. I would like to talk to you about the importance of school social work.

**The Ask:** I am asking you to support legislation adding a “school social work services” definition to the Texas Education Code.

**The Why:** Currently, there is no definition in the Texas Education Code for school social work services. Many Texas school children are faced with significant obstacles to learning, such as: as bullying, child abuse, substance abuse, gang violence, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, suicide, and other personal crises. A school social worker is uniquely trained to provide social work services that identify and address these complex problems and meet the needs of the whole child and the parents.

There are around 950 school social workers in Texas school campuses and districts right now. Adding social work services to schools and school districts allows teachers and administrators to focus on their work yet still provides valuable assistance and support to students.

**Conclusion:** I am happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you for your time!

Challenge: Create an Elevator Speech for a policy topic. Practice with a friend or colleague!
NASW/TX 2021 Legislative Priorities

Use the NASW/TX one pagers to learn more about our Legislative Priorities!
Federal Government Refresher

& If you want a laugh, check out this SNL video from 2018

Policy Issues
- Affordable Care Act Integration
- Child Welfare
- Medicare Reimbursement
- Social Worker Safety
- Student Loan Forgiveness

Sign up for NASW Advocacy Alerts!

NASW, Texas Chapter
National Association of Social Workers
Federal Level Advocacy

- Familiarize yourself with contacting both District and DC offices.
- Staff in district offices are responsible for lawmakers’ appointments and appearances in the district.
- Some staff function as caseworkers to help constituents with problems pertaining to federal programs and operations, such as eligibility for federal disability programs and immigration issues.
- Staff in the district offices usually do not handle legislative portfolios, but serve as important communicators, relaying constituent concerns to lawmakers, evaluating local problems and communicating the local impact of federal programs.
- Staff in the D.C. office usually handle multiple policy and legislative issues.

How to set up a congressional meeting

NASW, Texas Chapter
National Association of Social Workers
Send an Email or Letter

Look up your elected official’s contact information using "Who Represents Me".

Create a letter or email. Here is an example template to get started:

*Hi, my name is ____, and I’m a constituent. As a social worker, I am very supportive of your efforts related to veterans' mental health programs because it impacts my clients by ______. I have seen firsthand how this would impact our community by _____. I am asking Rep/Senator ____ to ____.*

If you use an email or letter template someone else created, it’s important to add a few unique sentences you write yourself. The more personalized, the better. Emails or letters that look like they came from a constituent get more attention and have a greater impact than something that’s a cookie-cutter form letter.
Advocacy Action Steps

Setting up a Meeting

Look up your elected official's information using "Who Represents Me?".

Use the script below and ask to schedule a meeting:

"Hi, my name is _____ and I am a constituent in your district, as well as a *social work student/social work professional*. Can I please set up a brief visit with the legislator or their staff to discuss policy issues important to social workers?"

National Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter
Write a thank you email or letter thanking the legislator or staffer for their time. Including your contact information and other materials that relate to your meeting.

Continue building a relationship with the office by offering to be a resource on a policy issue. This may be related to your job or a topic that you are passionate about advocating for.

If you took a picture with the legislator and their staff, be sure to ask them if it is okay to share on social media. Posting a photo on social media and tagging the legislative office is a good way to build a relationship.

Continue engaging with the office to build the relationship!
Advocacy Action Steps

Advocacy Phone Calls

If you have an advocacy ask for your legislator or elected official it can be effective to call their office to tell a staffer about your ask.

Once you have the office information, call and ask for the staffer that is working on the issue area you are concerned about.

Using an Elevator Speech, share your ask clearly. Be ready to answer any questions they may have. Ask if you can email them any materials you have, including your contact info.

Example script:

"Hi, my name is ____, and I'm a constituent. As a social worker, I am very concerned about House Bill 123 because it would negatively impact people in my community by ____. I am asking Rep/Senator ____ to vote against House Bill 123."
Social media is a great tool to raise awareness for an issue, gain the attention from elected officials and advocate for human rights.

Here are some tips to get started:

- Promote what advocacy organizations are already sharing
- Create graphics and flyers to promote your message
- Use existing hashtags like #TXlege or #MedEx4TX to garner attention
- Tag your elected officials or other stakeholders of interest

Follow us on social media to keep up with NASW/TX advocacy!
Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting
Let City Council know how you feel by testifying

Find the City Council Calendar Here

Let City Council know how you feel by testifying

Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting
Let City Council know how you feel by testifying

Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting and communicate with Council during public comment regarding agenda items
Austin

Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting
Let City Council know how you feel by testifying (See Austin Common’s Guide to Testifying)

San Antonio

Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting
Let City Council know how you feel by testifying or leaving a public comment online

Houston

Find your city council representative & district
Keep Democracy Working! Become an election worker!
Attend a City Council Meeting & City Council know how you feel by testifying or leaving a public comment
Thank you for being an NASW/TX member!

If you are not a member we would love to have you join us so that our advocacy can go farther!

Alison Mohr Boleware, LMSW
Government Relations Director
aboleware.naswtx@socialworkers.org