

## **NASW, Tennessee Chapter 2018 Legislative Issues**

*The NASW, Tennessee Chapter Legislative Committee and Board of Directors approved our annual advocacy agenda in January 2018. NASW-TN invites you to monitor the Chapter website at [www.naswtn.com](http://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 from the beginning of February until the Tennessee General Assembly adjourns. For additional information please contact the Chapter Office and make plans to join your colleagues at the NASW-TN Social Work Day on the Hill on Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup> in Nashville.*

### **Active Priority Issues**

- **Improving Student Success by Expanding School Social Work Services**  
Over the past decade, Tennessee has celebrated a period of groundbreaking change in our education system. Although there has been great progress, too many Tennessee students are not on track to graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education or to enter the workforce. Tennessee schools must also confront the addiction epidemic, youth suicide, mental health needs, poverty, homelessness, and other issues in today's society. School social workers have the education and training necessary to address these concerns. Yet, forty-four (44) percent of school districts in Tennessee do not have school social worker coverage. We are committed working to improve school success for students by expanding the number of school social workers in Tennessee.
- **Supporting 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. We will also work with the TASMIE coalition on legislation to excluding individuals with severe mental illness from the death penalty.
- **Promoting Social Workers as Leaders, Advocates and Champions for All Tennesseans**  
Social workers act as leaders, advocates and champions to improve the lives of all Tennesseans. Our diverse efforts include guiding the development of programs to address adverse childhood experiences to advocating for and championing new initiatives to better serve our growing elderly population. We will continue our work in 2018 to insure decision-makers understand the needs of those we serve. We will also monitor and work on laws that maintain appropriate recognition of social work professionals.
- **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. Family 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 Tennessee's important social infrastructure with an emphasis on enabling children and families to achieve long-term stability.

➤ **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.

## **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 legislators about evidenced-based practice in the area of foster care and adoption and oppose legislation that restricts Tennessee's children from living in loving, nurturing relationships with single or unmarried caregivers.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**

Social workers know that trauma during childhood can have critical implications throughout the lifespan. NASW-TN applauds the Governor and First Lady's launch in November 2015 of a three-year initiative to address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their impact on Tennessee communities. We will continue to support efforts to raise community awareness about the effects of adverse childhood experiences and to develop 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 of current 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.

### **Economy and Unemployment**

Many Tennessee counties have seen unemployment rates decline to less than 5% but some of our rural counties still have unemployment rates approaching 10%. NASW-TN supports the continuation of federal and state programs that help Tennesseans in vulnerable situations due to the economy and unemployment. We also remain committed to partnering with other advocacy groups to protect low income and vulnerable Tennesseans from predatory lending practices.

### **Health Care Coverage for Tennesseans, Including Our Most Vulnerable**

The Tennessee Chapter of NASW recognizes the important role 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,
- 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 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 health care changes will have on Tennessee communities.

### **Human Trafficking**

Human Trafficking is the second-fastest growing criminal industry in the United States, just behind Drug Trafficking. NASW-TN commends the response of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and Tennessee General Assembly in addressing this issue in collaboration with local government and nonprofits. 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.

### **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 the work of the Children's Cabinet in implementing 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.