BY:
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THE ODD COUPLE?
SOCIAL WORK & POLITICS IN NORTH CAROLINA
Foreword

A Letter from the desk of Kathy Boyd, the Executive Director of NASW-NC:

Despite the clever title, social work and politics really isn’t an odd couple at all but rather a comfortable companionship. I remember having a conversation with MaryAnn Black (profile on page 7) a long time ago. She let me know that a County Commissioner’s biggest budget items and, therefore, biggest issues were related to education, Departments of Social Service, and Medicaid. These were all things that as a social worker, she was experienced and familiar with. She knew the clients and knew the frontline consequences and issues in a way that most people don’t. To her it made perfect sense to be tackling these issues on a more macro level. Instead of working one-on-one with an individual Medicaid client she was focused on the Medicaid system and working to solve the system problems. The system will never change if we don’t advocate for our clients on a macro level. As social workers, our educational background is unique. We see the individual as a part of a family, a system and a society. How can we not be involved in policies that impact that individual client? I challenge us as a profession and as individual social workers to step up to the plate and get involved at every level of practice.

Kathy Boyd, ACSW, CMSW
Executive Director

“It’s not a question of getting started. The start has been made. It’s a question of what’s to be done from now on.”

~ B.F. Skinner
State Elected Officials
Howard Lee, Orange County, NC

**Education:** MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Currently:** Involved with the Deans of Social Work & Deans of Education

**Previous Elected Positions:** Local NASW Chapter President, Chapel Hill Mayor, North Carolina Senator

“Social Workers should be influencing policy and not just implementing policy.”

**Motivation to seek elected office:**
Mr. Lee always had “a fascination with politics,” but it was not until he joined the military in the 1960s that he truly “began to understand the influence of politics.” In 1967, a year after earning his MSW, Mr. Lee chose to run for president of his local NASW chapter and was elected. Following his term as president of his local NASW chapter, Mr. Lee entered himself as a candidate in Chapel Hill Mayoral elections. In 1969, Mr. Lee was elected Mayor, becoming one of only three African-Americans holding mayoral positions in the United States at that time. Mr. Lee served his community in a variety of ways, perhaps most memorably, by implementing free public transportation in Chapel Hill. Following three successful Mayoral terms, in 1990 Mr. Lee was elected to the North Carolina Senate, where he served for thirteen years. Since serving his state as his local NASW chapter president, Chapel Hill Mayor, and North Carolina Senator, Mr. Lee has been Chairman of the North Carolina State Board of Education, Executive Director of the North Carolina Education Cabinet, and works extensively with the Deans of Social Work and Deans of Education.

**What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:**
Originally hoping to pursue a law degree, Mr. Lee found himself working as a mental health specialist in the military, when he first began considering social work. In a time when “social work primarily focused on case work” Mr. Lee knew he “wanted to do community organizing.” Since embracing his interest in social work, Mr. Lee has learned the benefit of social work presence in political issues. Having seen legislation pass that is sometimes harmful to children, families, and others, Mr. Lee recognized that social workers’ unique perspective and understanding of the issues that affect vulnerable populations gives them the skills and responsibility to be “influencing policy and not just implementing policy.”

**Should social workers seek political involvement:**
In discussing social work and the need for political action, Mr. Lee urged social workers to “engage in the political process,” feeling it is the profession’s responsibility to be actively involved in crafting policy, rather than exclusively implementing the result and dealing with impacts at the service level. Regarding the lack of social work presence in the political realm, Mr. Lee described that it can hurt the clients social workers serve, in addition to maintaining “the profession’s passive image of only providing case work.” Mr. Lee felt this lack of clearly defined role possibilities “does not help recruitment into the profession. What we have to do as social workers is let the public know the value of the services we provide and the need for social workers in business and in government.”

* Interview & material conducted & contributed by Deona Hooper, NASW-NC Intern 2010. Edited & adapted by NASW-NC Intern Lauren Absher, 2013
County & Municipal Elected Officials
Alan Beck, Davidson County, NC

Education: BSW, Western Carolina University

Current Elected Position: Davidson County Board of Education, Member

“"You can stand on a stump and scream for change, or, work quietly behind the scene to make change.”"
Donna Bell, Chapel Hill, NC

**Education:** MSW, Smith College

**Current Elected Position:** Chapel Hill Town Council, Member

“The only way we can get the best is to have a variety of voices involved, including social workers.”

**Motivation to seek elected office:**
After obtaining her MSW from Smith College, Donna realized “to do macro” level work in addition to her direct practice. With support and encouragement from others, Donna sought a position on the Chapel Hill Town Council in an effort to weave her interests in both macro and direct practice social work. As a member of the Council, Donna attends various meetings and public hearings while also “working with folks in the community.” Ultimately, her role as a Council member is to “advocate for and maintain programming that benefits the community and alleviate things that could cause folks harm.”

**What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:**
As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Donna finds that her training assists her regularly in her work as an elected official. Social work, which to Donna, is “all about systems” bolsters her political acumen by helping Donna “find ways to change, adjust and modify systems that aren’t serving the community.” Working to serve Chapel Hill alongside economists, dentists, businessmen and others allows her an opportunity to infuse her public service with the “perspective and values of social work,” as she and her colleagues collaborate around issues like “zoning ordinances, transportation plans, housing recommendations, and how to distribute funds for certain services.”

**Should social workers seek political involvement:**
When discussing whether social workers should actively seek political involvement, Donna states, “Yes, I most definitely do.” Recognizing the need for committed and involved individuals in politics, Donna describes that “lots of advocates and voices supporting different things in the political sphere” are needed in order to affect positive changes for the populations social workers serve. She encourages all social workers to seek some form of involvement, from serving on commissions and committees to serving on local and state Boards and in elected positions.
MaryAnn Black, Durham County, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Currently: Associate Vice President for Community Relations, Duke University Health System

Previous Elected Position: Durham County Commissioner

“Clinical work is good and helps many, but if you want a bigger impact and to help others in a large way, politics gives you a way to do that.”

Motivation to seek elected office:
A respected member of her Durham community, MaryAnn has been politically active since her teens — political involvement a lifestyle preference. In college, MaryAnn was actively involved in leadership capacities with the campus’ YWCA, her sorority and more. Her interest in political action was reinforced during graduate school at UNC Chapel Hill, when a professor made the comment that “the way in which we can truly serve is to go into public office and have an impact on legislation and public policy.” This comment reinforced MaryAnn’s passion for politics, and in 1990 she chose to strive towards becoming a public servant and influence policy creation and implementation, by running for a position on the Durham County Board of Commissioners. Once elected, she served on the Board from 1990 to 2002. From 1996 to 2002, MaryAnn served her community as Chair of the Durham County Commissioners. As an elected official MaryAnn worked with her colleagues to address a gamut of issues regarding land usage, water quality, public education, and changes to the Department of Social Services “to enhance delivery of service.” Additionally, MaryAnn and her fellow Commissioners oversaw and provided funding for various services including: education, public health, and the Sheriff’s Department.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
One quality MaryAnn feels social work contributes to the political arena is “the art of compromise.” When working in a politicized environment, social work skills and values “help you work together, understand group dynamics, management, and how the mind works. All of those teachings combine to give a perspective and skill set that allows one to stand outside of himself, observe what’s going on, and figure out how to work with people for the greater good of the people.” Additionally, social work’s understanding of systems was valuable to MaryAnn during her stint as a Commissioner, stating “understanding how you work, how systems work — helps you to be a good elected official.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
MaryAnn’s obvious passion for political action is clear in her assertion that it is important not only for social workers, but everyone, to be politically active, and that there are a variety of ways to do so. Whether involvement is through “your neighborhood, church, local, state, or federal government—for any form of government to work well, we need people with different disciplines involved. It makes a better political body.” MaryAnn also offers the reminder that when being politically active, “it is not about who’s right or wrong, the winner or the loser. The real win is when you do something good for the people.”
Jacquelyn Gist, Carrboro, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Current Elected Position: Carrboro Board of Alderman, Member

“Apolitical social workers make no sense. More social workers in office means there is a greater chance of hearing the human side of things.”

Motivation to seek elected office:
Prior to being elected to the Carrboro Board of Alderman in 1981, Jacquelyn recalls having had political aspirations, even as a child at age 6 she hoped to become the first female President. This interest in political activity lasted to adulthood, where she had always been involved in her Carrboro community in a variety of ways, but it was not until graduate school that her political activity spiked through a field placement working to start the local homeless shelter. After graduation, Jacquelyn ran the shelter and served her community in additional ways through involvement with Friends of Old Carrboro, the Carrboro Board of Adjustment Committee, the local Democratic Party, and many other locally active organizations. This high level of community engagement garnered her much favor in her community, leading a group of local progressives to approach her to run for a position on the Board of Alderman in 1981. She won the election and has been serving on the Board since. Currently, she describes how as an Alderman, “every now and then I have an opportunity to do something flashy.” She recalls prior to the Iraq war proposing French Resolution in Carrboro, where during the month of April Carrboro engaged in a French trade month, or having opportunities to “do things directly, like helping intervene when a low-income, predominantly Hispanic apartment complex owner was harassing tenants and trying to force them out”, or “looking at ways to mitigate landfill effects on low-income communities.” However, she feels that most of her position is “not about the flashy stuff, it’s about the everyday details that make a community liveable.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique/needed in the political arena:
In discussing her position as an Alderman through a social work lens, Jacquelyn states “it’s the only lens I have,” speaking to the significance of social work presence in politics. Serving on the Board with a fellow social worker, she noted that social workers, “without even thinking about it, try to work collaboratively, build consensus, and look behind the surface and figure out what’s really being said.” Appreciative for the diversity, professional competence, and acumen of her fellow Board members, she notes that social work is different from the other professions represented on the Board. Where some may be concerned with getting “rules to line up and making sure systems are working,” social workers concern themselves with “who is this affecting, how is it affecting people’s lives, and most importantly, is it fair.” Her position as an Alderman with a social work background helps her ensure that she is able to spur dialogue about “what is fair to the person who actually has the quietest voice” in her community.

Should social workers seek political involvement:
The connection between social work and political involvement was clear to Jacquelyn. When considering the political climate in North Carolina, she asks “if social workers aren’t involved, who will be?” This question was put forward by her concern for the clients social workers serve, positing that political involvement is critical in making sure social workers continue to have the resources to serve their clients, or maintain employment. Jacquelyn encourages all social workers to “be involved, even if it’s in self-interest” and to be involved particularly at the local level, where what is occurring locally “has a direct impact on lives. Whether it’s the School Board, Town Council, or Advisory Boards—all of these need the social work perspective. You don’t have to be an elected official to get involved.”
Motivation to seek elected office:
Michelle’s motivation to seek elected office generated from her deep connection to her Carrboro community. Michelle has lived in Carrboro for eleven years “in the heart of downtown”, where she has found her community to be welcoming and likeable. Her strong appreciation for her community, high level of involvement, and her social work skills as a private practitioner, made her feel she would be a valuable addition to the Board. Elected in the fall of 2011, she stays busy “getting up to speed with issues the Board is involved in, talking to the community, town, and town staff.” These issues have required her to learn about many new things including the ins and outs of land use, public works, streets, sidewalks, building standards, water quality and how these things will impact the community and residents.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique/needed in the political arena:
As an Alderman, Michelle has found her role has been one of “facilitator, mediator, and advocate,” all of which are firmly embedded in social work. Although new to the Board, she has found that “sometimes [the Board] loses sight about why we’re talking about issues and who it will impact. Social work helps mitigate this.” Towards that end, she has found social work’s nature of “problem solving, being creative, active listening, looking at long-term goals and how to get there,” have all been practical skills for an elected official. In addition to those skills, she has found that social work’s deftness for compromise or “willingness to be in the gray” has been useful, particularly in considering the “multi-dimensions to issues that come up. It’s important because we’re conditioned to be binary thinkers, but life is not that way. Multiple things and multiple truths happen at once.” Very complimentary of social work’s contributions to politics, she states “lawyers bring the law perspective, environmentalists bring the environmental perspective, and social work can bring the importance of process and transparence to the table.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
When discussing the need for social workers to be politically active, Michelle states, “I absolutely think so.” Social workers, with their unique training and perspectives have the potential to enhance the political process and politics “needs social workers who have these skills and can remember the citizens who elect us and we are accountable to.” Personally, as an elected official, Michelle feels that “social work helps us stay true and remember why we’re doing the work we’re doing and stay intentional.”
Paige Sayles, Franklin County, NC

**Education:** MSW, Florida State University

**Current Elected Position:** Franklin County Board of Education, Member

“Social work helps start action and keep discussions flowing.”

**Motivation to seek elected office:**
Paige’s political involvement began on a personal level, as she had four children in school and was concerned about school issues and how they could impact her children. To address her concerns, Paige began attending school Board meetings and found, at the time, the Board seemed “issue oriented” rather than focused on larger scale, school system health. Having found that she did not “like the Board’s direction and felt they needed to think of all kids and all schools,” she decided to run for a position on her local Board of Education. Paige perceived an injustice or inequality in her community and took action to become more directly involved in tackling school system issues. Since 1998, Paige has worked alongside fellow Board members in considering who needs help and how the Board can work together to meet those needs and enhance their community.

**What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:**
Social work “affects everything” Paige does in her work as a member of the Board of Education. Her experience in both direct and macro practice allows her to “look at the whole picture” and consider how issues “will effect teachers, kids, and families.” The prevalence of Systems Theory in her work helps her examine issues critically and use her “knowledge to help fellow board members understand systems and how change happens.” Paige has also found that social work offers a grounding in solving problems, rather than being “reaction oriented or just complaining” about problems and issues that arise.

**Should social workers seek political involvement:**
Based on her experiences with social work and political action, Paige is “surprised that more social workers aren’t” politically involved. According to Paige, social work and politics are a “natural fit”, but she recognizes that political involvement “may depend on what your strengths are.” Paige’s interests have tended towards macro level issues, but she feels persuaded that politically active individuals “have to be able to see big picture stuff” and overall, “if there were more of us [social workers] out there, we wouldn’t be in the mess we’re in now.”
John Steele, Cleveland, NC

**Education:** MSW, Virginia Commonwealth University
Ph.D., Catholic University

**Current Elected Position:** Mayor of Cleveland, North Carolina

“If you don’t ask questions and take action, nothing will happen.”

**Motivation to seek elected office:**
After an opening among the Town Board of Commissioners, John was encouraged to run for the vacancy and was elected. He served as a Commissioner of Cleveland from 2001 to 2009. In November of 2009, John ran for the position of Mayor of Cleveland and won, following his two year term to run again in the November 2011 elections, where his community re-elected him as Mayor. He will not seek re-election after his term expires in December of 2013. Born and raised in Cleveland, it is fitting that John serves as Mayor to the town he calls home. He enjoys being a visible presence in the community, making sure to reach out to residents, both new and old, actively demonstrating his care and concern for each community member. In addition to typical Mayoral responsibilities, John also takes his care for his community to schools, sharing his experiences with students, hoping to inspire future political and community engagement from the upcoming generation in an effort to best serve his town.

**What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:**
According to John, social work prepares practitioners to work with others, consider their needs, and be conscious of differences in ethnicities and cultures through its strong emphasis on seeking cultural competence. Social work, in addition to his experiences world-wide, has helped John develop an acute understanding of socialization, extended groups and how “they intersect, in terms of making decisions about community and working together.” Additionally, social workers are well trained in community and social action. For John, “politics is social action” and “unless you ask questions and take action, nothing will happen.” Locally, John’s long history of social work practice in the United States Army and Air Force, Children’s Services, Community Organizing at the military level, and Home Health & Hospice have all prepared him to serve his community as a consultant, facilitator, and catalyst, where social work practice with groups has been “invaluable” in his political service to Cleveland.

**Should social workers seek political involvement:**
In discussing politically active social workers, John feels social workers should be politically involved because “it helps our profession.” To elaborate, John describes the misconceptions about the profession and how politically involved social workers can help dismantle some of those myths. Additionally, John has seen the value of political action manifest gradually, but evidently through changes spearheaded by the Civil Rights movement, where riding on the bus and seeing diversity today is an example of a change that resulted from the work and investment of politically active individuals and groups. Now, John is using the skills from his diverse social work résumé to breathe his passion for social change into budding social workers at Appalachian State University where he is an adjunct professor in the Department of Social Work.
Tom Stevens, Hillsborough, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Current Elected Position: Mayor of Hillsborough, NC

“We’re talking about some of the most fundamental aspects of community and what impact we have on quality of lives. Issues social work grapples with far transcend provision of social services.”

Motivation to seek elected office:
During college, Tom spent time teaching and working with kids, and after graduation he became a pre-school teacher. Following teaching, Tom worked in group homes, and with those experiences realized he wanted to work with families as a family therapist. With that new direction in mind, Tom earned his MSW and enjoyed a twenty year career in mental health and human services as a therapist. He also worked in various program director roles, and spent twelve years as a family service agency executive director, all while being very involved in his community and local non-profits. However, he took a sabbatical after which launching his own business as a Leadership Consultant. Working from home, Tom realized although he lived in downtown Hillsborough, he “missed being involved in the community because [he] was so involved with [his] business.” As a result of feeling disconnected from his community, Tom decided to run for Mayor, “really to get involved with the community.” He won the election by thirty-nine votes and is currently serving his fourth term as Mayor of Hillsborough. Despite having been less politically involved previously, Tom has deftly managed the “very steep learning curve to learn how things are done and know the people.” As a result of feeling disconnected from his community, Tom decided to run for Mayor, “really to get involved with the community.” He won the election by thirty-nine votes and is currently serving his fourth term as Mayor of Hillsborough. Despite having been less politically involved previously, Tom has deftly managed the “very steep learning curve to learn how things are done and know the people.” Currently, he serves his community by chairing Council meetings where he works to “set a tone of collaboration,” representing his town at various events, and ultimately, being “a cheerleader” for his community.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Tom has been able to draw heavily on social work principles as a Mayor. As an individual who often serves as the face of his community, social work has trained him to have “respect for collaboration and working together” in addition to building rapport with his constituents by helping him consider “the dignity of each individual regardless of their station in life.” This sincere respect for all members of his community also serves Tom in his service in that he grounds much of his work in Systems Theory, where he strives to “help people improve their lives” by examining “how systems influence people and how people work as a group.” Tom used much of these skills and principles in his work as a family therapist, but he feels that it is “much the same for communities. Systems Theory, Theory of Change, giving people opportunities to participate, all have roots in social work.” Overall, Tom feels the true “strength of social work is a much stronger appreciation of inclusion, diversity, and human behavior in the social environment.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Tom believes social workers should seek political involvement, stating “As should all citizens.” From his perspective as an elected official, Tom realizes that “for the most part, a lot of folks don’t pay attention to politics—the reality is, it’s just a few people who tend to get involved and those voices make a real difference.” He encourages everyone, social workers included, to “get involved in a way to advance what is good for their community.”
**Edith Wiggins, Chapel Hill, NC**

**Education:** MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Previous Elected Positions:** Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education, Member
Chapel Hill Town Council, Member

“Some issues you are very psychologically and emotionally involved in, they tug at your core values and beliefs and you have to make your way through the maze of others’ values and beliefs.”

**Motivation to seek elected office:**

Edith has a rich history of political activity, but recalls her motivation to run for elected office began with concerns around school issues, particularly redistricting and how it would affect her children. She took her concerns to School Board meetings where she felt, in addition to racism, the real issue for parents opposition to redistricting was that they “did not feel in control. It was not a family decision so people did not like it.” Edith’s attendance at meetings allowed her to witness the School Board deal with issues around school overcrowding, underutilization of some schools, and racial balance. She saw how the School Board had to discuss and grapple with those issues and thought “I can do this.” With “overwhelming and enthusiastic support” from her community, Edith ran for a position on the School Board and won, serving two terms. In addition to her service to Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools, Edith was also appointed to the Chapel Hill Town Council, and afterwards, ran for a position on the Town Council twice, winning both times. After becoming a Council Member, Edith recognized that the Council was “made up of strong factions that fought” and she “didn’t see any attempts [by the council] to come together and solve problems” and she did not “think that was a good way to govern.” Serving in a highly politicized environment, Edith relied on advice from a former School Board colleague, Ed Caldwell, who advised her to remember that “the issues are never black or white, good or bad, up or down — your job is going to be choosing the right shade of gray.” Overall, Edith served her community with at least 17 years of public service.

**What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:**

For Edith, social work was “invaluable” during her time as an elected official and was even part of her School Board campaign platform. Social work is “people oriented and training is in empathy, listening, understanding, and not being judgmental.” This training was critical in helping Edith serve as a balanced official, who invested much time and work in service for her community, with both support and opposition from constituents. Additionally, social work helped Edith navigate relationships with fellow Board and Council Members, where she was able to use her skills to better understand her colleagues and appreciate that they had “different points of view, not bad or wrong points of view, just different.” This skill to meet others where they are, while striving to examine issues from a systems perspective helped Edith serve, realizing that “a lot of systems are operating on all of us in our day-to-day lives, nothing is isolated.”

**Should social workers seek political involvement:**

Edith feels social workers should be politically involved, but understands that they are often overworked and underpaid, leaving them little time or energy to expend elsewhere. But for those who are in a position to be involved, Edith reminds them “it doesn’t always mean running for office and serving on boards. You can start with lesser involvement — community involvement, education and awareness — get your feet wet.” She also feels that if social workers want to solve problems they “must be willing to act — you can analyze, think, and understand, but nothing will change if you don’t act.”
Lobbyists
**Matt Gross, Raleigh, NC**

Education: MSW, Virginia Commonwealth University
Currently: Smart Start, Policy Analyst

“We have a responsibility to promote public policy that creates social justice. Increasing opportunities for people to succeed should be the goal of social work and public policy.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
After earning a Bachelor degree in Psychology with a minor in social work during his undergraduate career at North Carolina State University, Matt knew he “liked helping people and thought [becoming a therapist] was the best way” to do so. However, he quickly learned during the first year of his MSW program that he “liked helping [his] friends solve problems, but got easily frustrated with people who didn’t want [his] help.” It was a culmination of life and graduate school experiences, particularly his love for the social welfare policy course, that helped him determine with finality, that the “clinical route was not for” him. Working with the Department of Social Services around foster care issues emphasized this, because, at the time he was working with “great people who had willing clients who couldn’t get results, and I knew it was because of a broken system.” He realized that “policy change could help towards fixing the broken system.” Currently, he is using his obvious passion for “making larger scale policy change” by working as a lobbyist with Smart Start, where he examines the “parameters we’re operating in to figure out what is needed to achieve better results” for children and their families.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
As a social worker who spends a vast amount of time disseminating information, mitigating threats that result from misinformation, and serving as an expert in child development for the benefit of legislators, Matt has found social work to be invaluable in his practice. Particularly, he recognizes that “it’s really the social justice lens that I look at everything through.” Additionally, the social work degree with its emphasis on education in conjunction with practical experience, “creates folks who enter the policy world with a better sense of what policy looks like on the ground and a more well-rounded view of social justice issues.” The holistic nature of the degree with its social justice focus helps Matt and other social work advocates work towards giving “the most folks the best shot of giving themselves and their families a good life through initiatives like high quality early childhood education, progressive tax policies that encourage upward mobility, and access to basic needs like housing, food, transportation and healthcare. If you don’t provide people with basic needs, it will be hard for them to flourish.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Matt feels that social workers should be more engaged in politics but reminds social workers that “doesn’t mean everyone should go macro. It could be local politics, working in the legislature, or somebody who works in a clinical setting but gets frustrated with a policy and uses that experience to inform those working at the policy level. Then you get a good policy grounded in practice.” In addition to encouraging social workers to become more politically active, he also urges social workers to “encourage their clients to exercise their right to vote by making sure they’re registered and have a way to get to the polls. We should ensure their economic position doesn’t create disenfranchisement and prevent them from expressing their voice.”
Erika Hagensen, Raleigh, NC

Education: MSW, University of Washington

Currently: The Arc of North Carolina, Assistant Director for Policy

“Clinical support is important, but without systemic change, we will be providing the same clinical support forever.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
Erika distinctly recalls the moment she realized her passion for systemic change. Serving on the Board of Directors for a disability nonprofit in Oregon, she recalls the group asking an adult the organization supported to describe what it is like to live with a disability. He wrote one word on a sheet of paper — oppression. This moment served as a “call to action,” motivating Erika to pursue an MSW. Erika’s enthusiasm to affect systemic change was also influenced by her recognition and appreciation of previous leaders in the disability community who championed “the rights I currently enjoy because of their work.” Erika has dedicated much of her career to analyzing policy around intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) issues, working in coalition with partner organizations and stakeholder groups, and lobbying at the federal level around disability issues, including successfully working to restore the Americans with Disability Act to align with Congress’ initial intent. Currently, Erika works with The Arc of North Carolina where she views her priority as “increasing participation at the federal level, so our community can understand and respond to issues effectively.” She also uses her energy and passion to raise awareness of the health needs of the IDD community, specifically the aging, and responding to state policy issues as they arise.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Erika recalls during the course of her experiences in public policy, “so many people [she] valued and saw as effective, turned out to be social workers.” For her, the connection between social work and politics is evident, as the profession’s strengths in “consensus building and bringing diverse and unlikely stakeholders to the table” helps her as a social worker in policy to best identify “how a policy or law affects a population. Any number of degrees can teach you to analyze policy. Social work, in addition to critical analysis, emphasizes social justice and helping people understand their role in making good policy, strong communities and effective government.” In addition to being centered around social justice, Erika finds that social workers are adept at striking a “balance between being strong and principled but also being good partners,” allowing them to collaborate with those they don’t always agree with, and “leave the door open” for future communications. In policy, “you never know how you will meet one another, on a different topic, on a different day.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
When asked if she felt social workers should seek to be politically involved, Erika responded, “yes and no — in a way that it makes sense for the person. Not everyone needs to quit their job and move to D.C. like I did.” She recognizes that at the clinical level, practitioners do impactful work, see “the effects of policy long before [policy practitioners] may” and “need to be able to communicate these issues to people who make policy.” Without that insight, we can’t move forward. Furthermore, Erika feels that social workers, and others, have to first recognize their unique and valuable role in many areas of policy, before they can become truly engaged. “We need to teach people — including ourselves — that everyone is ‘a policy person’. That doesn’t have to mean a content expert or lobbyist necessarily. A policy person is someone who shows up, participates, tells their story and empowers other people to do the same,” a skill deeply embedded in social work practice. “As social workers, we can help people discover that their voice is important, needed, and necessary for government to work well.”
Alison Kiser, Durham, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Currently: Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina, Director of Public Affairs

“As social workers we are obligated to make change wherever we see that change needs to occur.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
Alison always had an interest in the political process desiring to, “create change from the top down.” She feels the most effective way to “get change at an individual level, is at the macro level,” where policies and their implementation affect individuals and families at the direct practice level. To Alison, it is very clear that “we’re all connected — policy and direct practice level social workers. We serve the populations we’re advocating for,” speaking to her motivation to work towards informing the development of policies that best meet the needs of various populations. Towards this, Alison has been working with Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina as a lobbyist since 2008 where she uses her passion to “draw people into the political process and encourage their participation through grassroots advocacy.” She devotes much of her time to analyzing policy and investigating policies that could occur in North Carolina. Additionally, she manages outreach efforts to engage supporters and potential supporters “about how they can help create systemic change.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Speaking again to the very nature of social work, where social workers both serve and advocate for their clients, Alison feels the Code of Ethics and social work emphasis on putting people first is what gives social workers a unique perspective on the political process. Additionally, she describes her belief that “the very basis of social work practice is the right our clients — anybody has — to self-determination,” which is what led her to work around public policy issues. She cites the NASW Code of Ethics as a guiding force for the value of client self-determination where, in her work with Planned Parenthood, “pregnancy decisions are personal and complex and as a social worker I want to make sure healthcare is a right, not a privilege.” She feels helping individuals gain access to the care they need “fits well with the social work ideal that people need to be able to make educated and informed decisions about their lives.” Based on her experiences as a social worker in public policy, Alison feels that social workers are generally “not creating legislation for legislation’s sake. The number one focus we have is on the people who will be impacted by the policy.” This person-centered perspective is valuable in “this type of work — you’re able to feel people out — legislators, potential supporters you’re trying to engage, and reaching a place where you can get something positive done together.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
When asked about the need for social workers to be engaged in the political process, Alison responds, “Definitely. I think social workers are ethically obligated to fight for their clients. Beyond that, we’re obligated to fight for our clients at whatever level necessary.” Whether clients are affected by public policy, lack of a needed program, or an agency policy, Alison feels social workers must “fight to make change, and often that has to happen in the political arena.” She reiterates the importance of social work presence in politics because the profession’s “perspective is valuable in educating leaders about what is going on and the challenges in their communities” to impact policies that affect positive change for the populations social work serves.
Karen McLeod, Raleigh, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Currently: Benchmarks NC, Lobbyist & CEO

“Social workers are supposed to be agents for social change. Apathy, for those not engaged, seems like they’ve lost their intent about what social work is all about.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
After realizing her strengths lay in macro social work, Karen has worked in macro positions at state and county levels, and is currently working in the private sector. In the private sector, she has found a “freedom to speak for clients that is amazing.” Her role as a Lobbyist and CEO of Benchmarks NC is not only to hold the state accountable for services, but also to educate the state regarding the needs of the populations she serves. Currently representing ninety agencies, Karen uses her training to “give a voice to social workers and clinicians who don’t have time to message for themselves because they’re doing the work” on the ground level.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Social work has equipped Karen to evaluate systems, identify needed changes, and “move pieces in place to improve quality of care” for the populations her organization serves. Particularly as an MSW lobbyist Karen can “speak social justice for those who can’t,” while seeking to improve quality of care across systems. Such improvement can influence the pursuit of social justice — which she describes as the root of social work. In addition to grounding her social work practice as a lobbyist in seeking social justice, Karen also uses social work skills to start where the client is, in this case legislators, and embrace that concept. Being able to start where the client is has allowed her to respect, if not always agree, with the people she works with, understanding she can use this skill to affect change. Social work has also taught her that politics is about “evoking systems change,” and to evoke change one must critically examine their position as a social worker, not only on an individual level, but also the systems level.

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Strongly passionate about macro social work and political involvement that can help foster an environment of social justice in North Carolina, Karen states, “social workers are supposed to be an agent for social change. Apathy, for those not engaged, seems like they’ve lost their intent about what social work is all about.” While strongly emphasizing social workers’ responsibility to be politically engaged and informed, Karen does advise social workers to consider that most of what occurs at the political level “isn’t about right or wrong — that’s disheartening. But you have to find a balance. Understand how systems work, work in their confines, and be clear in yourself—that you are here for change.”
Alex Miller, Raleigh, NC
Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Currently: Contract Lobbyist

“Position yourself to be part of a solution. You’re either involved in it, or it is happening to you.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
When describing his passion for lobbying, Alex states, “It was accidental.” Prior to graduate school at UNC Chapel Hill, Alex provided direct services for adults with developmental disabilities. A state funded position, Alex noticed flaws at the policy level that “prevented qualified professionals from delivering quality services” to that population. Taking his direct practice experience to graduate school, Alex completed an internship at the Covenant with NC Children, where he tracked school violence issues and made policy recommendations for his internship’s legislative agenda. Post graduation, Alex was able to turn his interest in reducing school violence into a career, serving as a contract lobbyist, where his efforts helped result in the School Violence Prevention Act of 2009. Enjoying his time working at the state level, where he has found political involvement accessible, he serves his clients by building relationships with legislators and colleagues to affect change where possible, recognizing that “law isn’t easy to change.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Social Work, with its person-centered perspective, taught Alex to work with people where they are and not to impose his belief systems on others rather, to encourage others, like legislators, to “take ownership of a positive decision.” Social Work’s Code of Ethics also serves Alex as a tool to help inform the decisions he makes as a lobbyist on a daily basis. Similarly, he has found social work’s “strong tradition of hands-on work” to be valuable. With years of direct experience, Alex elaborates that, “if you’re going to be involved in shaping social policy, you should have experience working on the ground level. You need to see how consumers and practitioners’ lives look. Always keeping foremost in our minds who it is we’re trying to serve.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Alex feels everyone should experience political involvement and “more social workers are needed here,” with the caveat that dedicated political involvement “isn’t for everybody.” Political involvement is an individual decision that “can be challenging and rewarding.” Often, in his work he has found “You’re the only person speaking for those you represent and that is not always easy.” The lack of understanding in the general population about what social work is, and the stereotypes that accompany social work and the populations it serves can make political involvement difficult. However, Alex states that, “as a profession, social work could do more education about the profession. If social work issues are seen as crucial [in politics], it’s more difficult to justify cuts that could hurt others.”
Kay Paksoy, Raleigh, NC

Education: BSW, Campbell University

Currently: National Association of Social Workers-North Carolina Chapter
Director of Advocacy, Policy, and Legislation

“Political involvement can help people maintain their lives, which are defined by state leaders.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
Political awareness an integral part of her family structure and function, Kay’s introduction to lobbying occurred during an internship while studying abroad in London during her undergraduate work at Campbell University. Placed at Marie Stopes International, Kay’s introduction to political advocacy focused on women’s health and teen issues where she delivered a presentation to Parliament. Later, she completed an internship at the National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter (NASW-NC), where she was further introduced to advocacy at the state level. Both experiences, abroad and domestic, showed Kay that “advocacy is a global issue. Seeing it as a global issue sparked that passion” and has translated into a career with the NASW-NC where she works to build relationships with fellow social workers and state officials to disseminate information to social workers on how certain issues will affect the profession and the populations they serve. Her advocacy work has helped her learn to balance the “reality of your own goals” in the context of what “really happens in government.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
For Kay, social work has taught her to “look at a situation from the whole perspective. What has led a person to us, what is available to them, and look at a problem from different angles and have community partners.” Kay feels social work is critical to the political process because social workers are present in a variety of settings and have a multi-faceted training that gives them an edge in understanding how legislation will impact their clients. In addition to the proliferation of social workers in various sectors, Kay has found social work’s Code of Ethics to be a valuable tool when engaging in advocacy work at the state level. Using the Code to examine specific legislation and determine “how it supports or does not support the profession of social work” helps “lend credibility and professionalism to the issues we go after.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Social work and political involvement, according to Kay, go hand-in-hand in that, “We’re community workers and legislators are community representatives — therefore, they NEED to hear from social workers from all over their districts. Outside of this, it is a great way to advocate for our clients — we need to better voice the issues in our districts by talking to our legislators and finding solutions.” In addition to being vociferously in favor of a politically engaged social work profession, Kay also reminds social workers that political and social action are “in our code of ethics — the driving force of our profession.”
Carley Ruff, Raleigh, NC

Education: MSW, Washington University
Currently: North Carolina Housing Coalition, Policy & Outreach Coordinator

“When social work divorces policy, our work is like a band aid.”

Motivation to work in the political arena:
While attending graduate school at Washington University in St. Louis, one of Carley’s first MSW courses, social welfare policy, helped direct her towards becoming a lobbyist. Carley enjoyed learning how “one change in policy can affect thousands.” At the time, her social welfare professor, a lobbyist, saw potential in Carley and became her advisor. That relationship helped lead her to an internship at Catholic Charities, where she worked in the advocacy office with a former state senator doing housing intake at the edge of the economic recession. With her social work education and macro experience at Catholic Charities, Carley knew she “wanted to marry [her] love of housing and lobbying” and began working for the NC Housing Coalition three and a half years ago. In her current role at the NC Housing Coalition, Carley works to be “the expert in the room with legislators”, where a lobbyist’s role is “very important as a social worker representing the needs of vulnerable populations who don’t typically have a voice.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
According to Carley, social workers are trained in such a way that they “automatically come in understanding certain systems” and are able to look at an issue on individual, community, and systems levels, always considering how a policy could “affect each level—something that is very unique to social work.” For Carley, this understanding is essential in that, “it’s easy for people to be Raleigh-centric and not think about how policies look on the ground,” whereas social workers are educated to “see the impacts of policy on the ground level” and often have direct experience to guide that understanding. Community organizing is also a social work skill Carley has found useful in her work. As she described it, her work isn’t “just lobbying. You have to reach out and build grassroots support and know how to talk about these issues.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Although political involvement, as a lobbyist and generally, can be both “overwhelming and underwhelming”, Carley feels more social workers are needed in the political realm. “No matter where you are in the social work field, macro or micro, everything you do is touched by policy, politics, and regulation. Every job type is affected by policy and social workers are experts about what needs to be changed, and need to be at the table.” Carley encourages social workers to be both informed and engaged in terms of politics and to make sure they are actively “getting their voice out and making sure systems are just.”
Other Advocates
Dan Beerman, Winston-Salem, NC

Education: MSW-MDIV, Rutgers University & Princeton Theological Seminary
Currently: Lecturer, Joint Masters Program at University of North Carolina Greensboro and North Carolina A&T State University

“Politics is the authoritative allocation of values. We deal with decisions that are made by authorities and we need a place at the table.”

Motivation to be politically involved:
An active member of NASW-NC, Dan has served on the NASW-NC Political Action for Candidate Election (PACE) Committee, and Chaired the committee from 1983 to 2005, with a brief interruption when a colleague chaired the committee prior to joining the NASW-NC staff. As a committee member and Chair, Dan worked to ensure the Association’s members were well informed about their “political options,” and, as a group, worked to “be as engaged in the political process as the law allowed.” Dan expressed a desire to run for office at one point, but working for county government at the time made political involvement difficult. After realizing there are numerous ways “to have impact on what our society values” politically, Dan looked to Boards and Commissions for involvement, and served as head of the Winston-Salem Transit Authority Board of Directors from 1996 to 2012. When asked about the connection between transit and social work, Dan described that “core riders are low income, receive public benefits, and can’t afford transportation. This is where I can have influence and authority with legal clout to use money for what is the greatest good.”

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
Specific to his experience with the Transit Authority, Dan found he was able to “give the social work perspective on Boards and Commissions and always reminded colleagues who the clients were and what the social work perspective was.” Social work, with its person-centered focus, ensures practitioners consider the client first and, in Dan’s experience, this can translate well into political involvement and leadership roles from the PACE Committee to heading the Transit Authority. Additionally, social work has continually reminded Dan that political action is “all about relationships” and he has cultivated good relationships over the years “with a variety of people who have respect for” the work he has done, politically and professionally. But, according to Dan, what “we [social workers] really bring is — we can inform people. When they’re puzzled about why someone may interact with the world the way they do.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
In considering the importance of politically active social workers, Dan felt that “all social workers should find the right level of political involvement for themselves.” Understanding that different people will have different levels of comfort and interest in the political process, Dan reiterated that the NASW Code of Ethics “calls us to find a level of political engagement — we are professionally obligated to be involved at some level.” Whether you are involved in voter registration, work on an election campaign, or run for office, social workers can offer a perspective and skill set that has the capacity to enhance the political process.
Karen Oelschaleger, Buncombe County, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Currently: President, Buncombe County League of Women Voters

“The more we can do to instill our mission in the political process, the better. Hone in on what you’re passionate about and become politically involved. It’s not just voting and presidents—it can be more fulfilling than that.”

Motivation to be politically involved:
Passionate about politics, particularly at the local level, Karen recalls having been “attentive to local politics since returning to North Carolina from Connecticut.” She has found local level politics engaging because, at that level, you are “bumping into elected officials” when you go about your daily business, and overall, “local politics is much more accessible.” Karen is the youngest woman to be serving as President of the League of Women Voters in her area, and chose to be deeply involved with this group out of her growing passion for “the increasing role of women in policy, politics, and government.” Using her love of local politics and role as President of the League of Women Voters, Karen works from a non-partisan perspective to “create room for dialogue and getting to the facts about legislation and policy.” Her group works around multiple issues ranging from healthcare to election reform, all in efforts to educate their community, build relationships, and engage in advocacy efforts around pertinent issues.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
According to Karen, social work requires practitioners to “advocate for the disadvantaged as a moral and ethical obligation” outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics. This responsibility transfers well into political action, in that it creates opportunities for social workers to “educate and inform people by making information accessible, condensing it, and helping different groups understand it and how it affects them,” which could, in turn, lead others to embrace their right to be politically involved.

Should social workers seek political involvement:
In discussing social workers and political involvement, Karen states “more social workers, all social workers, everyone, should be politically involved.” However, she advises individuals to “make politically involved your own. Find out what works best for you and your lens and interests. Find your niche.”
Laura O’Neal, Nash County, NC

Education: MSW, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Currently: Democratic Women, Chairwoman

“Anger brings energy, as long as you channel it correctly.”

Motivation to be politically involved:
Laura has led a full career in human services for 41 years, during which she has served as Director of Social Services, where she learned the correlation between upper-level political decisions and the impact on social workers and the populations they work with at the service level. As a social worker in social and human services, Laura learned that cooperation is needed from both Democrats and Republicans to ensure quality service delivery. However, when a position is funded by the County Government, according to Laura, it can be difficult to be politically active. Her political activity spiked when, after retirement, the local Sheriff recruited Laura to manage his election campaign. Following a successful campaign, Laura received other requests from candidates and began her transition to heightened political action. This new level of political engagement led her to volunteer to be nominated for the Chair position of the Democratic Women. As Chairwoman, she takes the lead in “organizing and executing ground plans for the Democratic party” in her community.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
As Chairwoman of the Democratic Women, Laura is able to use principles of social work on a daily basis. The requirement of social workers to seek social justice “plays a large part” in her work. Whether educating people in her community about their voting rights, or working to “break through distrust” to reach out to marginalized community members, Laura has found that social work offers a “wonderful balance of empathy, listening, trying to understand a person, and, at the end, being able to confront issues and have courage.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Considering political involvement from a practical perspective, Laura feels that, depending on the environment in which social workers practice, “they can or cannot be” politically involved. However, if social workers aren’t working in “a nonprofit or bound by funding, I hope they would be [politically involved] and generally think they are.” Personally, Laura’s political involvement was spurred by witnessing the “mean-spiritedness of people”, where, upon reflection, she realizes she “had to get mad as hell to get this passionate. Anger brings energy as long as you channel it correctly.”
Tanya Roberts, Craven County, NC

Education: MSW, East Carolina University
Currently: Operation Medicine Cabinet, NC Project Coordinator
NC PACC, State Coordinator
Previous NASW PACE Committee, Member
Previous NASW-NC Chapter President
Craven County Board of Education, Candidate

“Have ownership of your political identity. If the goal is to make better decisions for your community, you have to do what is needed in order to do that.”

Motivation to seek elected office:
An active member of the NASW at both the state and national level, Tanya recalled the beginnings of her appreciation for the political process occurred in high school when she attended Governor’s School in South Carolina. There, she was selected to meet Governor Riley, the meeting serving as a catalyst for her political interest. However, it was after graduate school when Tanya became “fully engaged in local elections in 2008.” Due to her heightened political engagement, Tanya elected to enhance her knowledge and skills regarding politics, attending the Institute of Political Leadership where she learned in a multi-party, diverse atmosphere, the mechanics of political candidacy—including becoming a candidate and supporting other candidates. Tanya also chose to advance her understanding of the political process by undergoing the Women in Office Institute at Peace College. In 2012, Tanya used her political interest and acumen to enter herself as an unaffiliated candidate for a position on her local Board of Education.

What social work brings to the table that is unique or needed in the political arena:
While Tanya found her election campaign to be “financially, mentally, and physically exhausting” it was an experience she “will never trade” that was heavily influenced by her social work training. For Tanya, one of the most valuable lessons from social work that transfers smoothly to politics is the ability to “be able to meet people where they are.” Although this is a critical component of politics, Tanya recognizes that it can be difficult to honor this social work tradition, especially “across party lines on issues people feel so fundamentally passionate about. Ultimately, both sides want to get to the same place, but differ on how to get there.” In addition to being able to respect individual perspectives and work from that level, Tanya also found social work’s holistic approach, the person-in-environment perspective, useful in helping her assist others to “see a wider perspective and look at all factors — to look at the community as a community. None of us exist in a microcosm. We’re all affected by people, actions around us, and what is going on in the community.”

Should social workers seek political involvement:
Tanya described politics as “a place where social workers need to be engaged.” She advises social workers that, for her, getting “people to listen to what’s important to me, as a woman, as a wife, as a mother — I have to show them we can get past our differences.” This ability is one Tanya feels is natural to the social work profession and could “go a long way in the political sphere.” Ultimately, no matter your political affiliation as a social worker, Tanya instructs that “to make political progress you have to be able to come to the table. We need more balanced social workers in politics.”
Additional Resources & Information
North Carolina Resources for Political Involvement

- **North Carolina State Board of Elections**
  - Guidelines for running for elected office at Local, State, and National levels
- **North Carolina Democratic Party**
  - Official website with access to local parties and ways to become involved
    [http://www.ncdp.org/home](http://www.ncdp.org/home)
- **North Carolina Republican Party**
  - Official website with access to local parties and ways to become involved
- **North Carolina Libertarian Party**
  - Official website with access to local parties and ways to become involved
- **National Association of Social Workers-North Carolina**
  - Opportunities for association member involvement on both the Legislative and Political Action for Candidate Election Committees
  - Legislative Committee: [http://www.naswnc.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=87](http://www.naswnc.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=87)
- **Institute of Political Leadership**
  - “The Institute of Political Leadership is a multi-partisan, non-profit educational institution formed to improve the quality of political leadership in North Carolina at the state and local levels. IOPL develops the political skills of North Carolinians with potential to be the state's future political leaders.”
    [http://www.iopl.org/home.html](http://www.iopl.org/home.html)
- **Leadership North Carolina**
  - “Leadership North Carolina (LNC) works with state luminaries to improve North Carolina’s quality of life through visionary hands-on programming that integrates the areas of economic development, education, environment, government, and health and human services. Through six two-and-a-half-day sessions held in locations from the mountains to the coast, LNC participants gain knowledge and build networks that they can leverage personally, professionally, and for the benefit of the state and its people.”
- **Women in Office Institute**
  - “An intensive residential leadership program. It is an introduction to what’s involved in public service work, including appointed and elected office.”
    [http://www.nccwps.org/NCCWPS/Content/Page/WOMEN-IN-OFFICE-INSTITUTE.html](http://www.nccwps.org/NCCWPS/Content/Page/WOMEN-IN-OFFICE-INSTITUTE.html)
- **Lillians List**
  - “Lillian’s List of NC is a statewide community of individuals who work to recruit, train, promote and support pro-choice Democratic women running for public office in North Carolina. We are modeled after EMILY’s List and provide financial, strategic, and political support to women serving in the state legislature and the Council of State. We also strategically recruit new candidates committed to reproductive freedom and equality for women.”
Opportunities for Advocacy with NASW-NC

N.C. PACE:
The NASW-NC Political Action for Candidate Election Committee (PACE) is the political action committee of NASW-NC. Committee members determine which candidates most align with social work values and Code of Ethics and endorses such candidates during both local and state elections. PACE makes financial contributions, in kind donations of mailing labels, and mobilizes volunteers for candidates’ campaign efforts. However, only members of NASW-NC can give money to P.A.C.E. and only members of NASW-NC can join P.A.C.E. and help determine appropriate endorsements to work towards ensuring the social work profession is better represented in local and state governments.


Legislative Committee
The NASW-NC Legislative Committee recommends actions to be taken on legislative issues and assists with developing the NASW-NC Legislative Agenda. Committee members also assist with calls for action by contacting legislators and spreading the word to other social workers. Committee members assist with plans for lobby days, legislative conferences, legislative fund-raising, and in reviewing and commenting on proposed legislation.

For more information about the Legislative Committee:

*For more information about becoming involved with either of these advocacy related committees, feel free to contact Kay Paksoy, Director of Advocacy and Government Relations at NASW-NC. She may be reached by phone at (919)-828-9650 or by email at kay@naswnc.org. Committee involvement is a NASW member benefit.*
**About NASW-NC**

Located in historic Oakwood in downtown Raleigh, NASW-NC is a 501 c(6) administrative unit of the National Association of Social Workers. Developed in 1955, the Chapter currently has five full time and two part time staff and serves over 4,500 members. NASW-NC’s membership is composed of MSWs, BSWs, and students who represent the social work profession in a variety of capacities throughout the state. NASW-NC works diligently to enhance each social worker’s professional experience by:

- *Creating* innovative resources like the Practice Area Networks, and New Professionals webpage to meet the growing and changing needs of the profession
- *Providing* advocacy on behalf of social work and social workers, and communicating real time legislative updates to keep members informed regarding policy and how it will impact the profession
- *Organizing* and hosting a variety of professional development and continuing education opportunities such as Local Program Units, the annual Fall and Ethics Conferences, and Licensure Exam Preparation Sessions

In addition to such benefits, NASW-NC also offers its membership various leadership and networking opportunities through volunteer service on the:

- Board of Directors
- Legislative Committee
- Membership Committee
- Ethics Committee
- Political Action for Candidate Endorsement (PACE) Committee

NASW-NC is committed to fulfilling its mission of being “*experts and leaders in creating and sustaining systemic change through ethical social work practice.*” NASW-NC works toward this by offering the aforementioned resources as well as representing social work through participation in statewide coalitions, committees and task forces, and by building relationships with numerous departments within state government, all with the goal of advancing and protecting the social work profession.

*For more information on the benefits of joining NASW-NC, feel free to contact Valerie Arendt, Director of Membership, Marketing & Communication at NASW-NC. She may be reached by phone at (919)-828-9650 or by email at valerie@naswnc.org.*