

National Association of Social Workers, Florida Chapter 2021 Legislative Priorities

The National Association of Social Workers, Florida Chapter (NASW-FL) is part of the world's largest organization of professional social workers, and represents approximately 4,300 professional social workers in Florida.

2021 Legislative Priorities

- * **Anti-Racism Legislation** – Legislation will be reviewed to determine the impact it will have on people and families of color in Florida. Disparities in health care, education and family income will also be examined in legislation and budget. An example of a proposed legislation for the 2021 session is Gov. Ron DeSantis' "Combating Violence, Disorder and Looting and Law Enforcement Protection Act," which creates new criminal offenses and increases penalties for people who target law enforcement and participate in violent or disorderly assemblies.
- * **Mental/Behavioral Health** – Mental health problems have been on the rise for at least a decade. Income inequality and racial disparities have also been linked to poor mental health outcomes. Our current service system is largely passive — we wait for people to ask for services. We need to create a system that reduces risk and is ready to respond at the first signs of potential problems. To create a new system, we need to change the way we think about investing in mental health. We need to support legislation for that decreases stigma and increases access, funding and efficient service delivery. We will also continue to advocate for practitioners who are well trained and provide clinical settings that are affirming to clients from diverse backgrounds.
- * **Social Work Workforce** - Provide direct mental health services to people most in need by allowing Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) to be reimbursed independently for their service delivery. Recognize the importance of the social work profession, workforce challenges, and wages and employment trends. Advocate for the hiring of social workers in schools, child welfare services and mental and behavioral health services. Look at alternatives for student loans for social work students. Support fair and higher reimbursement rates and wages for social workers and revise the social work licensure laws to allow greater mobility and equality for social workers.
- * **Voting Rights** – Protect the rights of justice-involved individuals to have the right to vote without having a financial hardship. Support the right to have accessible voting options and advocate against any voter suppression tactics. Ensure that all votes are counted.
- * **Policing and Social Work** – Reduce the number of police officers in schools and advocate for hiring more social workers. The current number of police officers in schools is more than double the number of School Social Workers and Psychologists. Advocate for reform of police culture/acclimation and anti-bias training for police officer along with accountability for officers who violate the law. Work to advocate for some funding to be reallocated to social services that help communities thrive.
- * **Licensing for Social Workers** – Work to provide a scope of practice for the Certified Master Social Worker (CMSW). Advocate for the 8 hour laws and rules exam to be a part of the application process. Support alternative options for Interns who complete the five-year intern process without becoming licensed so that they still have an opportunity to obtain their license. Advocate for outcome transparency with ASWB.
- * **Child Welfare** - Strengthen the clinical supervision of child welfare workers with hiring/contracting LCSWs in the DCF system. Provide resources to child welfare workers to have manageable caseload sizes. Advocate for policies that support the safety and well-being of children by encouraging resources that focus on prevention.

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- ✳ **Immigration Justice** - Advocate for fair and just immigration policies, which emphasizes dignity not detention. Ensure people and/or agencies are held accountable for mistreatment to those who are in their care. Advocate for policies that provide access and opportunity to the needs of our Immigrant communities so that they do not have to live in fear and are able to thrive.
- ✳ **School Social Work** – The need for school social workers continues to be supported: The percentage of youth arrests happening at school hit a five-year high of 20 percent. The number of students expelled from school increased 43 percent. Schools reported more than four times as many incidents of using physical restraints on students. Advocate for the delivery of mental health services in schools. This would also tie into a decrease in the number of school police officers and an increase in the number of social workers and psychologists.
- ✳ **LGBTQ+ Rights** - Support the “Florida Competitive Workforce Act” to prohibit all discrimination in workplace hiring and public facilities. Prohibit conversion therapy for minors.
- ✳ **Protection of Safety Net** - Advocate against reinstating the work & recertification requirements for SNAP, TANF & Medicaid. Ensure continual access to these benefits, especially considering the challenges being experienced by COVID 19.
- ✳ **Health Care** - Expand access and affordability for health services for Floridians and oppose any policies that restrict access to care. Promote and advocate for Medicaid Expansion to ensure health care insurance for everyone in Florida.
- ✳ **Criminal Justice Reform** - Support legislative policies that promote reasonable, equitable, criminal justice laws, juvenile diversion and sentencing guidelines. Advocate for treatment rather than incarceration for challenges related to mental health and substance use disorders.
- ✳ **Veterans and Military Families** - Expand mental health services for Veterans and Military families by expanding the statewide 211 pilot program. Promote legislation that supports the seamless implementation of these services.
- ✳ **Climate Change/Environmental Justice** - Climate change disproportionately impacts clients in Florida who are low-income. Our communities of color face the worst aspects of gentrification because of climate change and lack of environment related worker safety rules.

NASW is a membership organization that promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and through its advocacy.

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