



National Association of Social Workers Maine Chapter 2023 Legislative Priorities

Professional Social Work Issues

Social Work Loan Repayment

(LD 632 – An Act to Amend the SW Education Loan Repayment Program)

The debt load carried by Maine social workers combined with low salaries are causing many to consider leaving the field at a time when there is already a shortage of behavioral health providers. Of the 450 social workers reporting debt, the average MSW owes over \$77,000. NASW ME will advocate for the funding for the current Social Work Loan Repayment Program.

Social Work Modernization

The existing laws governing Maine social workers forbid social workers from diagnosing and treating “organic medical illnesses” (recently defined by the Board of Social Work Licensure here in Maine to include such DSM-5-TR disorders as ADHD and Autism) and place barriers to the process of psychosocial assessments that are not placed on other behavioral health providers. NASW ME will advocate for removing these restrictions, which hamper social workers’ ability to work collaboratively with patients and others on the health care team and address needs of clients.

Social Work Workforce Development and Behavioral Health Access

Maine needs more educated, competent, and trained social workers to address the behavioral health crisis in our State. Current barriers to licensing for new MSW graduates, including the current testing requirements for graduating master’s level social workers, are causing hiring delays for organizations, adding another financial burden to new graduates, and are a contributing cause of the current shortages in the behavioral health work force. NASW ME will advocate to remove barriers to licensing for the LMSW and LMSW-CC levels of licensure for MSW graduates.

Increase Social Workers and Counselors in the Schools

Across the state, educators report growing concerns about the mental health of students and the need for schools to provide more counseling services and mental health supports for students. NASW will advocate for social workers in the state’s school funding formula going forward.

Supporting Women & Families

Paid Family Medical Leave

Women, BIPOC, and low-income Mainers are less likely to have medical leave and financial savings to support them during their own, or a family member's, medical or other crisis. NASW ME advocates that Mainers need a PFML system with reasonable, shared employer-employee graduated contributions to make this happen.

Educational Issues

NASW ME opposes limiting students’ access to school curriculum or banning/censoring curricula that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts

or social emotional learning. NASW ME supports Intellectual Freedom for Maine students while encouraging parent and guardian involvement in their child’s education.

Reproductive Rights

NASW ME believes that medical decisions about what happens to an individual’s body is between that individual and their health care provider. We support legislation that protects these rights and oppose legislation that challenges, chips away, or disrespects and decision making between an individual and their health care provider.

Social Justice

Immigrant and Refugee Care

Maine's economy is heavily weighted with service, produce, and farming jobs, many of which have laid vacant for several years. We depend on immigrant and refugee populations to take these jobs. NASW ME supports programs that provides New Mainers with access to medical and behavioral health care, safe housing, food, and transportation to help them and the Maine economy.

Economic Justice

The health of Maine's economy is as good as the health of all Mainers. NASW ME supports efforts that allow Mainers to have decent quality of life including bills that address a basic livable wage, access to safe housing, transportation, food heating oil assistance, broadband, medical care, behavioral health care and all other programs that address the social determinants of health.

Tribal Sovereignty

NASW ME supports Tribal Sovereignty for Maine's Indigenous population and the work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations in Maine. NASW ME champions any and all efforts to dismantle oppressive and discriminatory systems which disproportionately impact BIPOC communities.

LGBTQIA+ Youth Issues

LGBTQIA+ individuals, including youth, have come under increasingly targeted legislative attacks across the country. This discriminatory environment is contributing to behavioral health disparities, including increased rates of suicidal ideation and attempt, for this community. The health and wellness of all LGBTQIA+ individuals deserve attention and intervention. NASW ME believes that medical decisions for young people seeking gender-affirming care should be between the youth, family, and medical providers, not lawmakers. NASW ME opposes any legislation that seeks to restrict access to gender-affirming care or limits a young person's participation in school sports and other activities based on the young person's gender identity. Further, NASW ME opposes legislation that would seek to impact a young person's access to facilities (bathrooms, locker rooms, or recreation) that best align with their gender identity. NASW ME continues to stand firm against the harmful and lacking-of empirical evidence practice of Conversion Therapy.

Climate Change

All too often, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color have been overburdened by air pollution from power plants, congested highways, and industrial facilities. Our and coastal communities are particularly threatened by rising sea levels, flooding, and unstable weather patterns. NASW ME believes that we collectively need to do everything possible to address and ameliorate the effects of climate change and supports efforts that move our State in this direction. NASW ME sees the opportunity for Maine to be a leader and model for our country in addressing the climate crisis.