

**NASW MAINE CHAPTER
2025-2026
LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
132ND LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK ISSUES

ENSURING ACCESS TO SAFE AND AFFORDABLE MEDICAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE AND TREATMENT

Addressing our state’s social work workforce and the barriers to behavioral health care access is a top priority for NASW ME. Maine needs more educated, competent, and trained social workers who represent the communities they serve to address the behavioral health crisis in our State. With this in mind, NASW ME advocates for policy initiatives that will address:

1) Licensure Barriers and the Social Work Compact

NASW ME will advocate for removing barriers to licensing across all levels of licensure and support alternative licensing pathways. The current licensure exam has revealed stark disparities for racial and ethnic groups of test takers and is currently the only method of testing, raising serious concerns about equity and inclusion in the profession (Grand Challenges for Social Work Policy Brief, 2024).

A variety of barriers to licensing are contributing to the financial burden of new graduates, hiring delays for organizations, and are connected to the current shortages in Maine’s behavioral health workforce. We will continue our work on the Social Work Compact, passed in the last legislative session, to ensure it is operationalized in a way that continues to best represent Maine social workers and clients.

2) Student Loan Forgiveness

We need to continue to invest in reducing the education loan burden of social workers. Although Maine has had a social work education loan repayment program, it has historically not

been funded. We will continue to advocate for funding this program. To reduce the shortage, we need to attract and keep social workers in Maine by ensuring that our state provides similar loan forgiveness and other financial incentives as nearby states offer.

3) Increase Social Workers and Counselors in Schools

We will continue efforts to adopt and update current laws that promote access to services for Maine's youth. Educators report growing concerns about the mental health of students and the need for schools to provide more counseling services and mental health support, particularly in the most rural and underserved areas of Maine. NASW ME will continue to advocate for social workers in the state's school funding formula moving forward to best support schools, students, and families.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: ENSURING EQUITY, ACCESS, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL MAINERS

Financial Capability for All

Maine's economy is only as healthy as the people of Maine. NASW ME supports efforts that allow all Mainers to have a basic livable wage, reducing extreme economic inequalities. This includes access to safe and affordable housing, childcare, transportation, food, heating oil assistance, broadband/technology, education and training, medical care, caregiver support, and behavioral healthcare. We support and work to amplify the efforts of like-minded state partners like Maine Equal Justice, Maine Council on Aging, NAMI Maine, and others to advocate for fair public policies.

Immigrant and Refugee Care

NASW ME supports programs and legislation that protects and supports our immigrant and refugee Mainers. These Mainers contribute to our local economies and communities as consumers, business owners, and employees. The immigrant and refugee population are an

integral part of Maine's economy and often fill otherwise vacant positions in health care and social services, education, manufacturing, and agricultural industries.

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 all efforts to dismantle oppressive and discriminatory systems which disproportionately impact BIPOC communities.

LGBTQIA+ Protections

LGBTQIA+ individuals, specifically youth, have come under increasingly targeted legislative attacks. This discriminatory environment is contributing to increased rates of suicidal ideation and attempts and access disparities to behavioral health services. NASW ME believes that medical decisions for individuals seeking gender-affirming care should be between the individual, family, and medical providers, not lawmakers. NASW ME opposes any legislation that seeks to restrict access to gender-affirming care or limit a young person's participation in school sports and other activities based on the young person's gender identity.

Disrupt Carceral Logic

Maine has a disproportionately high percentage of Black, People of Color, and people living in poverty in our criminal legal system. To address the harms of carceral logic and incarceration, NASW ME supports efforts to prevent the unnecessary and punitive measures of carceral logic by promoting initiatives that foster healing. By investing in community resources and ensuring adequate access to social determinants of health and legal representation, we work to address psychosocial stressors that funnel our friends and neighbors into the criminal legal system and support legislation that provides care outside of carceral logic.

Violence

NASW ME supports efforts to promote sensible gun safety to reduce gun related deaths. Our state was devastated by gun violence in 2023. Guns are the leading cause of death by suicide and now are the leading cause of death of teenagers in the U.S. NASW ME supports comprehensive prevention strategies that includes legislative measures, education, and ensuring access to trauma-informed care for those most at risk of gun violence.

Reproductive Rights

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

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.

Climate Justice

Maine will continue to see an increase in climate disaster and impacts, as our state has been burdened with in recent years. Our 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. Given that marginalized groups are impacted disproportionately by climate change, we need to continue to bolster our social safety

net before disaster again strikes. NASW ME sees the opportunity for Maine to be a national leader and model for other states in addressing the climate crisis.