



BACKGROUND ON THE NASW/CT 2016 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

A note on our approach to the 2016 legislative session. It is a “short session” of three months with legislation somewhat restricted to budgetary bills and non-fiscal bills that have been raised by committee (vs. a single legislator). This fact, combined with the budget deficit and an election year will likely produce very little in new initiatives. Most advocates are hunkering down for a budget battle and looking to 2017 for potential new initiatives.

Another consideration for the 2016 session is that the chapter currently does not have an intern to assist with the policy work (the intern we had planned on has taken another placement) and the Political Director position will remain unfilled until such time that the chapter budget can sustain another staff position. Given this staffing reality having a scaled down agenda that allows us time to work on non-legislative policy initiatives and prepare for possible legislative initiatives in 2017 is the recommended approach for 2016. Thus ELAN is proposing a moderate size agenda.

Finally, one never knows what legislation will be introduced that requires us to take action on. As we have in the past we are looking to hold in reserve the capacity to respond to bills that either offer advancement opportunities for social work or stopping threats to social work practice in Connecticut.

Potential Bills:

Paid Family Leave – The chapter is part of a statewide coalition that is supporting paid family leave. While family leave legislation is on the books both federally and in state statute too often it cannot be utilized by caregivers as they cannot afford to take unpaid leave. There is a state task force that has reported out recommendations and the coalition has also made recommendations that go beyond the task force. As this is the second consecutive year of introducing this legislation we hope to make progress toward passage.

Social Workers to Nursing Home Beds Ratio – The current state regulation that is approximately 30 years old calls for a minimum ratio of 1 social worker for every 120 beds in nursing homes. This ratio is far outdated and absurdly high leaving insufficient time for meaningful social work services to be provided to residents and family members of residents. NASW/CT will have a bill introduced in the Human Service Committee to reduce the ratio to 1 social worker to every 80 beds, and in 2020 further reduce the ratio to 1 social worker to 60 beds (the latter is what is truly needed). Our initial goal for the 2017 session is to have a public hearing to educate legislators on the issue and hear from possible opponents, which we will accomplish, and to advance the bill out of committee.

Access to Original Birth Certificate – Previous legislation allowed adoptees who were 18 or older to acquire an original certificate of birth if their adoptions were finalized by

October 1, 1983. Legislation is now being anticipated to remove the 1983 date so that all adoptees have the same right to an original birth certificate. Access to an original birth certificate assists in obtaining personal health history. This bill will also end the two-tier system created by the 1983 date. NASW/CT supported and actively lobbied in support of the 2014 bill that gave access with the caveat of the 1983 date.

Modernization of Sexual Orientation Protections – This is legislation that will modernize the statutory definition of sexual orientation by broadening it beyond heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, and removing outdated language such as “sexual preference” and references to sexual orientation as criminal activity. It will move sexual orientation into the existing statutes alongside the other protected classes of race, sex, gender identity or expression, etc. prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, etc.

Budget:

Protection of Safety Net Programs and a Secure State Budget – Given the current budget deficit it is anticipated that further cuts and erosion to human services, health care and education funding will be on the table. NASW/CT will focus on protecting critical funding that serves the most vulnerable populations, with consideration to employment of social workers. NASW/CT is a coalition member of Better Choices that advances new revenue streams rather than budget cuts to meet the human needs of our state.