



November 22, 2011

**JOINT STATEMENT
OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (NASW)
AND THE MICHIGAN CHAPTER - NASW**

IN OPPOSITION TO S.B. 518 AND H.B. 5040

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its Michigan Chapter have serious professional concerns with Senate Bill 518 (S.B. 518) and House Bill 5040 (H.B. 5040). As the largest membership organization of social workers in the United States, and with a Chapter of 6,834 members in Michigan, NASW is compelled to comment on the two bills and identify some of the effects that their passage could have on the social work profession in Michigan. S.B. 518, introduced in the Senate on June 23, 2011 states that: "A public or private degree or certificate granting college, university, junior college, or community college in this state shall not discipline or discriminate against a student in a counseling, social work, or psychology program because the student refuses to counsel or serve a client as to goals that conflict with a sincerely held religious belief or moral conviction of the student, if the student refers the client to a counselor who will provide the counseling or services."

The language of HB 5040 mirrors the Senate bill.

In its role as a national professional association, NASW has disseminated and enforces a *Code of Ethics* for professional social workers which articulates the core values for the social work profession. The accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for many college level social work programs in Michigan and nationally, incorporates compliance with and adherence to the *NASW Code of Ethics* as a part of its accreditation review process. The principles contained in the *NASW Code of Ethics* form the foundation for social work practice. Among these are respect for social diversity and cultural competency and a dedication to the non-discriminatory treatment of clients/patients, important principles for work in Michigan with its diverse populations and ethnic groups. One of the specific tenets of the *Code of Ethics* provides that:

Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion and mental or physical disability. (1.05 Cultural

Competence and Social Diversity – Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers, NASW PRESS, 1999)

The social work profession has not condoned conduct in which the social worker selects clients or provides treatment based on negative thoughts or beliefs about a class of persons who have immutable characteristics, such as their race, color or national origin. Gender identity and sexual orientation have been treated similar to these other protected classifications for purposes of social work practice. Moreover, one of the purposes of a social work education is to gain competency in understanding and treating diverse populations in the larger society. The language of S.B. 518/H.B. 5040 would permit students to re-define and limit the scope of their training and the content of their academic program, contrary to the educational goals of the social work curriculum. The Michigan Administrative Code, Rule 338.2909, Rule 9(b) incorporates the concept of licensed Michigan social workers providing professional social work services without regard to the client's race, creed, color, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability as a part of the Michigan Social Work practice standards and in keeping with national social work principles incorporated in the NASW Code of Ethics. The S.B.518/H.B. 5040 proposal may appear to be protecting students, but it could ultimately jeopardize the ability of students trained to be social workers in Michigan to succeed in their employment and professional careers as social workers.

In order to ensure that social workers in Michigan are trained in keeping with the standards of the social work profession, we urge you not to support S.B.518 and H.B. 5040.