

## [Social Work Policy Podcast NC-NASW: Deciding What to Advocate For](#)

**Whitney Rosenblatt:** Hello and welcome to the Social Work Policy podcast brought to you from East Tennessee State University's College of Clinical Rehabilitative Health Sciences Department of Social Work. I'm Whitney Rosenblatt MSW class of 2023. Today we have Valerie Arndt and Kay Castelo with us to discuss, NASW's work that we do in North Carolina, as well as policy practice and what the organization does to do policy practice in our state. So thank you both so much for being here today. I appreciate your time.

**Kay Castelo and Valerie Arndt:** Thank you for having us.

**Whitney Rosenblatt:** Yeah and the first general question that I wanted to ask both of is what are your roles that you play in the North Carolina?

**Valerie Arndt:** Sure, so I can start. This is Valerie Arndt, and I'm the executive director of the National Association of Social Workers North Carolina chapter and essentially my duties is to provide leadership for the association. Association for social workers in North Carolina, so there's the National Association of Social Workers, which has over 100,000 members across the United States and internationally. But the North Carolina chapter works to support our over 5,000 members in the North Carolina chapter. So essentially my duties is to ensure that our membership is supported throughout the state and we do that by providing membership support, professional consultation, ethical consultation, and continuing education opportunities for our members. But the largest part of what we do is we are the only professional association in the state that provides advocacy and lobbying on behalf of all social workers in North Carolina. And I'm going to pass it over to Kay Castillo. It's the largest part of her job at NASW, North Carolina. Thank you.

**Kay Castelo:** So I'm the director of advocacy, policy, and legislation and registered lobbyist for the association, and essentially my role is to kind of take charge of our advocacy efforts, whether that's with legislators or even in our coalition work or working with State Department and really just our goal of providing a seat at the table for the social work profession. Among all the different areas that impact social workers and social workers can do a lot of great work across our state.

**Whitney Rosenblatt:** Thank you both so much for that introduction, and, you know, Valerie, you had mentioned that the North Carolina chapter is really one of the only advocacy groups here in North Carolina. And so how do y'all work and decide what policies that NASW will advocate for or advocate against?

**Valerie Arndt:** Sure, so the first thing we do is really look at the NASW code of ethics that is our guiding document, our ship, the ship that that directs the social work profession really in the directions that we need to take our advocacy efforts. So we start there and then also NASW has an amazing documents called social work speaks. That is a large volume of policies that NASW has put together over the years and updates on an annual basis, and it's written by the members. It's written by NASW and it's voted on by NASW delegate assembly, which is members from across the United States. So really, when an issue comes up, we look at our code of ethics. We look at the social work speaks policy in order to determine if we are going to pursue that advocacy issue and then Kay Castillo is our...really staff's our legislative

committee. So each state has their own legislative committee, which is made up of members and every year, or every other year, depending upon what's going on in the lead. That committee, along with Kay and our board of directors, comes up with our legislative agenda. So based on what's happening in the Legislature, what we anticipate to come up for legislation, so we draft that legislation again based on our code of ethics, based on policy speaks based on what's happening in our state at the time. And those are the issues that we pursue and of course, things come up throughout the year that it is an issue that is important to the social work profession, is important to the social justice piece of our code of ethics. So we really, the work that we do really is there to support the social work profession and advancing the work that we do as such work professionals, but also that social justice and social welfare piece. So all of those combined creates the work that we do for our advocacy.

**Whitney Rosenblatt:** And Kay, it sounds like there are so many ways that any NASW decides what kind of policies to advocate for or against lots of different players, and that is so much a part of your job. How do you tease apart things that are like immediate need to try to make changes and advocate for changes now? What can we do in the intermediate period and how and then longer term? We see this legislation, we see these patterns that maybe we can put that off.

**Kay Castelo:** And that's a great question. It really depends. So, you know, some of our issues that come up, you know, if a member brings something to our attention like, "Hey, you know, I'm not getting reimbursed right now by, you know, something's holding up my reimbursement with Medicaid or Blue Cross Blue Shield" or whatever it is, you know, they're not something we can kind of, you know, handle with Blue Cross Blue Shield or with NC Medicaid. So we can kind of this piece of, you know, this is a situation or just a member problem. But sometimes you know, you get enough members that are like, "Hey, I'm also having the same problem. I also, you know, I'm experiencing this" and then then we'll kind of say, "Ok, this is impacting, you know, more people than we thought. So what do we need to do about it? Is this an issue that we work with the Department of Health and Human Services on? Or is this a law that needs to be changed?" And that happens a lot. You know, with so much legislation just being introduced and thrown out there, you know, sometimes we do have to switch gears and take priority over certain things and let others go or, you know, just whatever needs to happen in the moment. And, you know, so for example, a bill might get passed and there's a section that impacts social workers. And now all these social workers are being told, "Hey, you need to switch gears and you need to do this", then we'll work on that. And if it was something that was a result of legislation, then that's going to take a longer time because we've got to pinpoint what the issue is. See how we can reverse it or make it better, you know, do we introduce legislation? Do we get some rules taking care of what is it? So it really just kind of depends on the issue, how many people are impacted and what it would take to get done to fix it.

**Kay Castelo:** But you know, and Valerie mentioned, are our board of directors our legislative committee are made up of social work members across the state with. So many great backgrounds in social work that we're able to use them and utilize their work and their expertise to help us with a lot of these things. So some of them might be able to say, Oh, I've got a contact for that or this is how I fixed it, or this is what I implemented in my practice. You know, and so that kind of camaraderie and working with other members can kind of help us propel things forward.

**Whitney Rosenblatt:** I feel like that's the beauty of social work too, is that as you bring more and more folks together with their different expertise and lived experience, that knowledge base just grows exponentially.