



SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD
NATIONAL ADVOCACY CENTER
Rise Up AND Act for Justice

Dear NAC Advocates,

I hope 2023 has begun with gusto for each of you.

I write in this new year having finished my first full calendar year as NAC's executive director. While change such as this can be challenging and the advocacy work itself formidable, staying grounded in our shared mission and connected both to mission partners and the larger advocacy community has allowed me to feel a prevailing sense of gratitude about this time.

I have learned a great deal, and together we have done some very good things! --Among them:

Passage of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act: Thanks to the joint efforts of many faith and secular partners over many years, we saw the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act pass into law. Pregnant workers are now afforded common sense accommodations on the job – they no longer are forced to choose between their livelihoods and healthy pregnancies. This victory shows that dogged determination over many years can bring the change we seek!

A Few Wins for Child Nutrition: The 2022 year-end spending package (or Omnibus) included provisions that will significantly decrease childhood hunger during the summer months, when kids are more vulnerable to missing meals. One provision made permanent a coronavirus pandemic program, the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer, or EBT, program. This program provides \$40 in supplementary grocery benefits per child for each summer month for families that rely on free or reduced-price school meals; it will begin in summer 2024. Another provision now permits “grab-and-go” free summer meals to be distributed in rural communities as part of the nationwide Summer Food Service Program, expanding access for more children in need. We appreciate these improvements, but advocacy will continue to ensure all kids in this nation of great wealth are well fed and cared for.

Temporary Protected Status for Vulnerable Immigrants: For immigrants from countries fraught with violence, natural disasters and other turmoil, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) provides protection from deportation and other benefits—for a time. The Biden Administration has expanded its use after the previous Administration sought to dismantle the program. In November, thanks to the work of many advocates and the good will of leaders, TPS was extended for more than 300,000 recipients from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Nepal who faced loss of protections on December 31, 2022. In December advocates also won TPS re-designation for Haiti. We are grateful for these protections for those forced to leave their homes in search of safety, and for these immigrants who contribute so much to our country.

Gun Violence Legislation: After nearly 30 years without any gun violence legislation, the June passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act was crucial. It represented critical movement on an issue the public is in large part in agreement about. NAC is acutely aware that more action is needed to make our schools, synagogues, grocery stores, concert venues - our world - safer, but we are encouraged by this coming together by Congress.

Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Act that passed in March reauthorizes VAWA through 2027, preserves advancements in previous reauthorizations, and strengthens and modernizes the almost 30-year-old law. The important legislation expands violence prevention efforts, supports and protects survivors, and holds perpetrators accountable for their violent actions. It provides for increased resources for law enforcement and our judicial systems, including in Native communities, while improving access to essential support services

such as healthcare and safe housing for victims. This was a long, hard-fought win for domestic violence advocates.

The Mainstream Addiction Treatment (MAT) Act is Law: With our nation in the throes of an opioid epidemic, the MAT Act has been called a game changer. Its provisions expand access to treatment for substance use disorder, provide additional resources to first responders on the front lines of the overdose epidemic, and extend important controls enabling law enforcement officials to reduce the supply and availability of illicitly manufactured fentanyl-related substances (FRS) driving overdose deaths. Together with our partners, we have worked for passage of this law that reduces overdose deaths, fights stigma and promotes healing.

Advocacy Work with Agencies on Mental Health (and some successes in the Omnibus!): In NAC's work with Good Shepherd partner agencies, we see their diverse responses to human needs within their respective communities but a shared commitment to honor the dignity of each person. Many served by these agencies require some level of substance abuse and behavioral health care. Through meetings with agency staff, gaps were identified that must be addressed through legislation. In collaboration with faith-based and secular non-profits, NAC advocated for changes to meet these multi-faceted needs including the accessibility and affordability of mental health care as well as increased licensed behavioral health professionals. The 2022 Omnibus appropriations bill passed by the 117th Congress included provisions that addressed several of the needs identified by Good Shepherd partner agencies, among them: greater pediatric mental health access, creation of mobile behavioral health crisis response teams, and increased funding for Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers.

Anti-(Human) Trafficking Advocacy: At the end of the year, for the first time, we engaged in some direct advocacy with lead Hill offices as they worked to get four anti-trafficking bills over the finish line. Thankfully, two of the four passed – the Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2022 (S.3949) and the Abolish Trafficking Reauthorization Act of 2022 (S.3946); we will journey on with the other two. Perhaps just as importantly, the experience reminded us of the importance of relationship-building in this work, and of the need to reach out (again and again), to be present, and to enter into the fray. In 2022 NAC also developed closer ties with the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking and we look forward to more collaboration this year!

But what about 2023? Now we have a new (and divided) Congress. What can we do with this time together?

We know differences abound in the 118th Congress – both between the parties and within them. But we cannot let these often polarizing differences discourage us. Our mission is clear – we work to keep the needs of the most vulnerable at the forefront. And we do this work in a way that seeks understanding of those with opposing views, and that stays true to our call to be reconcilers and to recognize the inherent dignity of every person – including those who think differently than we do. NAC will be sharing its [new video](#) – crafted in 2022 thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of our Good Shepherd Volunteer Erin Hood – with all members of the 118th Congress to introduce the organization and give them a sense of how we work.

We will share our particular goals and focus areas for this Congressional period with you soon in another email. In the meantime, thank you for your commitment to building a culture of justice – and your participation with NAC! Share this email with someone who would want to join with us on these issues and [urge them to sign up](#) for our emails and action alerts. And please don't hesitate to reach out to connect with us.

Best,

Fran

Fran Eskin-Royer, Executive Director
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
[301-622-6838](tel:301-622-6838) (work)

[Forward this Email to a Friend](#)