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NASW-IL Recognizes GSU Lecturer 2026 Emerging Social Work Leader

Three Illinois social workers recognized whose work reflects the aims of their profession: to uplift, defend, and transform.

Park Forest, IL—The National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter (NASW-IL) today announced the recipients of the 2026 NASW-Illinois Chapter Social Work Awards. The awards will be presented on Friday, November 13, 2026, at the chapter's quarterly leadership council meeting.

Established as an honor to give recognition to Illinois social workers and citizens whose work support and uphold the prime mission of the social work profession—to enhance human well-being, meet the basic human needs of all people, and put special attention on the needs and empowerment of people are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty. This year's awardees were selected based on their achievements and its impact on the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

One of this year's honorees is **Latesha Lillie Newson, MSW, LCSW** (she/her), recipient of the **2026 NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Emerging Social Work Leader Award**. Newson is a lecturer and BSW Field Coordinator at Governors State University. She served as NASW-IL Chapter President from 2023 to 2025. A mental health and social justice advocate, she advances equitable, transformative policy change. Since 2021, she has championed Treatment Not Trauma, advocating for humane crisis response and the reopening of clinics in underserved Chicago communities. In 2023, Mayor Brandon Johnson appointed her to the City's Mental Health System Expansion Working Group, which developed a roadmap for expanding behavioral health and crisis response. Her work helped reopen clinics in Pilsen and Roseland, add services at the Ledger Library, and expand C.A.R.E. across Chicago's 77 communities.

In support of their nomination of Newson, colleague Anjanette Young of Cafe Social Work Consulting wrote: "Latesha has consistently demonstrated courageous leadership by addressing complex and often controversial issues, including mental health system reform, racial justice, police accountability, workforce equity, and the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in behavioral health.... She has stepped beyond the traditional roles of educator and clinician to become a public advocate, engaging policymakers, government officials, and community stakeholders to influence systemic change."

The NASW-Illinois Chapter celebrates Latesha Newson and all of this year's honorees whose leadership, compassion, and advocacy strengthen the social work profession and the communities they serve.

Latesha Newson is one of three statewide awardees recognized by the chapter this year. To learn more about all 2026 award recipients, visit <https://www.naswil.org/chapter-awards>, or contact NASW-IL Executive Director Joel Rubin at jrubin.naswil@socialworkers.org.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. The NASW-Illinois Chapter is one of the association's largest chapters and advocates for over 20,000 social workers in Illinois alone. NASW strives to advance social work careers, grow social work businesses, and protect the profession while seeking to also enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through advocacy.