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Chicago Advocate for the Homeless Recognized as Public Citizen of the Year

Chicago, IL—There are nearly 720,000 social workers in our nation with roughly 20,000 in Illinois alone. That national number is expected to grow by 12 percent by the end of the decade, making social work one of the fastest growing professions in the nation. This is because the life-affirming services that social workers provide are needed more than ever. This is especially true as our nation continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, economic inequality, global warming, and other crises.

In continuation of this year's National Professional Social Work Month theme, "The Time is Right for Social Work," the National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter (NASW-IL) is honoring the work of some exceptional Illinois social workers and individuals of every generation, whose work promotes social justice and social change with and on behalf of the people and clients they serve.

One such exemplary Illinois citizen being honored this year is 2022 NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Public Citizen of the Year Award recipient Niya K. Kelly. **Niya Kelly** (MA, Loyola University Chicago; JD, Loyola University Chicago) is Director of State Legislative Policy, Transformation and Equity, at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH). Her work focuses on Illinois' state budget, public benefits, and housing insecurity policies. In her work she has drafted legislation including the creation of liaisons for students experiencing homelessness in college; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for community college students experiencing food insecurity; and access to free birth certificates for people experiencing homelessness. Niya understands that homelessness is a direct result of racism and inequities. At CCH she hosts a workshop for impacted people to better understand that homelessness is not created by individual failings but by systematic and institutional policies and structures.

In support of their nomination of Niya, colleague Sam Tuttle of The Policy Project wrote: "Niya is among the most courageous, ethical, and strategic fighters for justice that I have met. She is also one of the most trusted partners for other legislative advocates; galvanizing stakeholders toward shared goals and honoring their expertise in her efforts."

The NASW-Illinois Chapter is proud of the work of Niya and others like her who work every day to effect positive changes in their communities and beyond. Niya is one of four individuals being honored as this year's 2022 NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Awardees. To learn more about the other statewide awardees, please visit the NASW-Illinois Chapter website (www.naswil.org) or contact Joel L. Rubin, executive director, 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.