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CHICAGO CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR AWARDED LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

CHICAGO, IL— Each day social workers help break down barriers that prevent people from living more fulfilling, enriched lives. They work on the individual level, helping people overcome personal crises like food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, or limited access to good health care. They also advocate on a systems level to ensure laws and policies are adopted so everyone can access such services.

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

One such exemplary Illinois social worker being honored this year is 2023 NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Lifetime Achievement awardee Tom Kmetko. Originally from Ohio, **Thomas A. Kmetko (he/him), LCSW**, moved to Chicago to attend Wheaton College, earning his bachelor's degree in 1961. He attended the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, obtaining his AM in 1965. Tom held several positions with the Department of Public Aid before working for the Illinois Department of Children Services, holding several administrative positions. Beginning in 1986, Tom worked for several years providing mental health services. In 1990 he founded Kmetko & Associates, Ltd., a child welfare agency providing interstate compact services to DCFS. With his staff, Tom has dedicated the last 30+ years to the agency's growth, establishing it as a premier provider of services for the state.

In support of their nomination of Tom, colleague Rafael Leon, Board of Directors - Treasurer at Kmetko and Associates, Ltd., wrote: "Tom has spent his entire professional life in the social service and child welfare fields, protecting the lives of children.... [He] strongly believes that protecting children is the most important mission of the agency. To accomplish that...his agency has developed procedures that conform with the best practices in the industry and applies those principles to each individual situation.... [He] believes that creating a work environment for the staff to accomplish its mission is extremely important.... The agency he created has flourished over the years with exceptional staff and a nationwide reputation."

The NASW-Illinois Chapter is proud of the work of Thomas Kmetko and others like him who continue to break barriers in their communities and beyond. Thomas Kmetko is one of four individuals being honored as this year's 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 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.