**Timeline of Spring/Summer 2020 Advocacy Efforts**

**Involving Social Work Organizations and Groups**

July 14, 2020; Updated August 15, 2020

This brief synopsis of recent events pertains to the role of Social Work organizations and groups in response to George Floyd’s murder (a culminating event preceded by a long list of Black lives taken by police, which continues to mount).

Following George Floyd’s death, the Society for Social Work Research (SSWR) Policy Committee, on the suggestion and under the leadership of Dr. Darcey Merritt of NYU Silver School of Social Work, came together to draft a [SSWR Call and Commitment to Ending Police Brutality, Racial Injustice and White Supremacy](https://secure.sswr.org/sswr-call-and-commitment-to-ending-police-brutality-racial-injustice-and-white-supremacy/). This statement was, in turn, passed by the SSWR Board of Directors on June 4, 2020.  The statement highlights the moral imperative social work educators and researchers have to dismantle white supremacy in our policies and institutions (inside and outside of academia) and infuse an anti-racist lens in social work pedagogy and scholarship. On June 12th, Board members of the Social Work Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education (GADE), in collaboration with other Social Work faculty, especially Dr. Jerome Schiele, Professor and Chair of the PhD Department in the Morgan State University School of Social Work, also released a [statement on anti-racism](https://www.gadephd.org/Portals/0/GADEdocuments/General/GADE%20Statement%20on%20Anti-Racism%20June%2012%202020.pdf) outlining a future direction for Social Work doctoral education that expressed “full solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.” It is important to note that the National Association of Black Social Workers’ (NABSW) [code of ethics](https://www.nabsw.org/page/CodeofEthics) (which long pre-dates the horrific events of Spring 2020) encapsulates many of the positions and strategies more recently being elevated by other Social Work organizations.

In reaction to a [public statement](https://www.wsj.com/articles/social-workers-cooperate-with-police-forces-11592255480) (June 15, 2020) and a June 17th [social media post](https://twitter.com/nasw/status/1272973620965519360) that appeared to endorse the Administration’s executive order calling for more police training, put forth by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Dr. Laura Abrams, Professor and Chair of the Department of Social Welfare at UCLA and Dr. Alan Dettlaff, Dean and Professor of the University of Houston College of Social Work and a SSWR Board member, penned an [open letter](https://medium.com/%40alandettlaff/an-open-letter-to-nasw-and-allied-organizations-on-social-works-relationship-with-law-enforcement-1a1926c71b28) (June 18, 2020) to NASW and Allied Organizations on *Social Work’s Relationship with Law Enforcement*, signed by over 1,100 Social Work professionals and higher education institutions, and with which individual members of the SSWR Policy Committee felt aligned. At stake was whether the profession would coalesce support around a “Both/And” approach to addressing police brutality (enhanced training for police and more social work collaboration with police) or an “Either/Or” approach, involving a complete re-imagining of community safety policies and practices in alignment with the Black Lives Matter agenda. Also on June 18th, NASW released a [position statement](https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/2196/NASW-says-Trump-Administrations-police-reform-executive-order-is-inadequate?utm_content=bufferdfb18&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer) that more forcefully criticized the Administration’s executive order, but did not advocate for defunding the police. On June 30th, in response to the June 18th letter by Dr. Abrams and Dr. Dettlaff, a [statement by several Social Work leaders](https://medium.com/%40tmizrahi/social-work-and-the-police-its-both-and-let-s-proceed-with-courage-conviction-and-action-8da18014f0e) (Dr. Darlyne Bailey of Bryn Mawr College’s Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Dr. Terry Mizrahi and Dr. Steve Burghardt of CUNY’s Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, and Dr. Charles Lewis, Director of the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy) was published advocating a “Both/And” approach to achieving reforms in law enforcement. Also on June 30th, there was a [Congressional Briefing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzeG6X7eaeM) on *Black Lives Matter - Social Work and the Future of Policing*, in which several participants promoted a “Both/And” approach to ending police brutality.

Many SSWR Policy Committee members expressed strong disappointment that the profession was not elevating recommendations to defund the police, as endorsed by the [Black Lives Matter](https://blacklivesmatter.com/defundthepolice/) movement. On the heels of the SSWR Policy Committee’s continued discussions supporting proposals to defund the police and to further reinforce a position in support of defunding the police, SSWR Policy Committee Chair, Dr. Darcey Merritt and Committee Member Dr. Lenna Nepomnyaschy (Rutgers School of Social Work) collaborated with Dr. Alan Dettlaff and Dr. Laura Abrams, Dr. Jennifer Mosley (University of Chicago), and Dr. Sophia Sarantakos and Dr. Shannon Sliva (both of the University of Denver School of Social Work) in writing an [open letter](https://medium.com/%40alandettlaff/affirming-the-call-for-social-work-to-fully-support-defunding-the-police-8a2e3b370e5) released on July 8th, *Affirming the Call for Social Work to Fully Support Defunding the Police*. Members of the SSWR Policy Committee unanimously endorsed this statement. On July 14, 2020, the [Social Work Podcast](https://www.facebook.com/18661313237/videos/310765373631603/), hosted by Dr. Jonathan Singer (Loyola University of Chicago School of Social Work) then brought together Social Work leaders to debate and discuss the Both/And versus the Either/Or approach to ending police brutality. On the same day (July 14th), an [open letter and corresponding petition](https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/open-letter-from-social-work-students-alumnx) was posted by a group of Social Work faculty from around the country calling on students, alumnx, staff, faculty and administrators to support of Black Lives Matter and Defunding the Police. The NABSW also released a [position statement](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nabsw.org/resource/collection/E1582D77-E4CD-4104-996A-D42D08F9CA7D/Past_President_Benton_Position_Statement.pdf) on July 29th that addressed the historical underpinnings of the racial violence receiving the spotlight today, and prescribed solutions rooted in “the philosophies of African and African American origins.”

Several other developments provide further context for these debates and for calls to reform the Social Work profession. After a long period of deliberation within the Social Work profession, on June 26, 2020, the Grand Challenges for Social Work announced a [13th Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism](https://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org/grand-challenges-for-social-work/announcing-the-grand-challenge-to-eliminate-racism/), spearheaded by a network led by Dr. Martell Teasley, Dean of the University of Utah College of Social Work and President of the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work and Dr. Michael S. Spencer, University of Washington Presidential Term Professor in Social Work. Also in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, Social Work students around the country (see an example [here](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfERmq7jwOZnXKe1VH9ienx0TVFqRrxFn021ozUcHjgbRZRPg/viewform)) have been actively lobbying the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), a voice that has been conspicuously tepid in its [response to the ongoing police brutality crisis](https://cswe.org/News/Press-Room/CSWE-Statement-on-Social-Justice) (a follow-up response can also be found [here](https://www.cswe.org/News/General-News-Archives/Two-Pandemics)), to explicitly address anti-racism in the CSWE competencies and accreditation standards, to which all Schools of Social Work must adhere.  Importantly, the Social Work Coalition for Anti-Racist Educators ([SWCAREs](https://www.swcares.org/)), founded by a group of Social Work educators and scholars (Dr. Rosemary Barbera, Amy Fisher, Sequoya Hayes, Laura Hoge, Dr. Carol Hostetter, Dr. Sara Plummer, Desiree Stepteau Watson, Brittany Washington, and Charla Yearwood) has been advocating for fundamental changes to Social Work education since well before the recent uprisings against police brutality. Their contributions to the momentum for anti-racist pedagogy in Social Work cannot be overstated. In just one example of their reach and influence, SWCAREs hosted a Facebook Watch Party on June 30, 2020, featuring Rachel Cargle, a public academic and activist, on the topic of *Social Work So White*, which received over 24,000 responses from interested individuals. Many other individual scholars and students have sought to elevate anti-racist scholarship, pedagogy, and positions for decades. A full accounting of these individuals is not possible here, but numerous lists of anti-racist scholarship and teaching resources are becoming ubiquitous—examples can be found [here](https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/204842963/1357692923) and [here](https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=744325&p=5441086).

While the debate about how to end police brutality is not over, the national-level counterpoint to the Social Work profession’s earliest statements and public discussions on this topic, viewed by many Social Work professionals and scholars as “more of the same” and insufficient for achieving meaningful change, emanated in part from Social Work organizations like the NABSW, SSWR (with instrumental participation from the SSWR Policy Committee), GADE, and SWCAREs. These organizations are engaged in ongoing efforts to not only promote their various statements and positions, but to operationalize them in our Schools of Social Work. The future of Social Work education will undoubtedly be influenced by these actions (and in the case of SWCAREs, significant traction has already been made), as well as by the compelling and powerful voices and advocacy efforts of Social Work students around the country who are and have been demanding accountability from their professional and educational institutions.

Update: On August 14, 2020, a [Social Work Leadership Roundtable Town Hall on racial equity](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=777132846159200&ref=watch_permalink), which brought together leaders from many of the national Social Work organizations. At minute marker 37:00, the group discusses their respective activities in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. Throughout the 2-part event, Social Work leaders discuss their organizational plans moving forward to confront the profession’s racist and white supremacist foundations.