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Sarah Sapp

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## UM Social Work Students Discuss Justice with Lawmaker

Rep. Jay Hughes discusses policy affecting social work practice with students

NOVEMBER 15, 2017 BY SARAH SAPP

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State Rep. Jay Hughes urges undergraduate and graduate social work students to help the marginalized populations they represent by staying informed and engaged with local and state politics. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Communications

OXFORD, Miss. – Dozens of social work undergraduate and graduate students at the **University of Mississippi** recently joined state Rep. Jay Hughes to discuss issues of social justice in social work in Mississippi and beyond.

“One vein of social work that does not get as much attention as direct social work practice with individuals, families and groups is macro social work practice,” said Daphne Cain, UM chair of **social work**.

“Macro practice includes social advocacy and policy development that advocates for individuals

who find themselves among the most vulnerable in society. Social work advocacy engages not only in reflecting on the policies and decisions that are being made that impact the most vulnerable members of our communities, but also demands action when policies and decisions negatively impact marginalized groups disproportionately.”

The students were introduced to Hughes at Social Work Advocacy Day last semester, said Claire Griffin of Decatur, one of two students in the new doctoral program in social welfare.

“We were able to meet him and get a little insight into what is going on at the Capitol,” Griffin said. “He plays a big role in advocating for our social service agencies and their funding.

“When I’ve gone to the Capitol and listened to them discuss bills to be passed or not, he is an advocate for us, so to have him here is a blessing, really.”

Many people don’t understand social work’s commitment to advocacy for social justice, said Amy Fisher, assistant professor of social work and moderator for the event.

“You’ll find social workers proposing, lobbying and protesting all manner of policy and serving in all levels of government, employed at policy institutes and involved with legal advocacy, too,” Fisher said. “We’re really everywhere.”

Hughes emphasized to the students that state legislation and local ordinances, more often than federal legislation, affect the vulnerable populations social workers serve every day. Federal issues that politically divide the nation, such as immigration and abortion, distract voters from issues in their state and city that can be solved in a bi-partisan manner, he said.

“We tend to lose focus of civics and policy,” Hughes said. “Because of party identity, we fail to see that 99.9 percent of what affects us happens after Election Day, and it’s not in Washington by any stretch of the imagination.

“Policy is not at a federal level. It is what happens in Jackson, Mississippi, and Oxford, Mississippi.”

To illustrate, Hughes explained that 183 bills were signed into law last year in D.C., compared to 22,000 enacted on the state level and 500,000 signed into city ordinances.

The students discussed bills from the last legislative session that were defeated, in part, because of their professional organization’s vocal opposition, including House Bill 1425.

H.B. 1425 would have granted the governor power to make appointments to an Occupational Licensing Review Commission, affecting 26 state licensing boards, including the Mississippi Board of Examiners for Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists.

Hughes joined the National Association of Social Work-Mississippi Chapter in opposing the bill and met

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OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation’s capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

with Ole Miss student members during the annual Social Work Advocacy Day in February at the state Capitol to discuss the bill's potential ramifications.

"What is going to work is dealing with the problem – putting educated, trained social workers in charge of educating and training social workers who understand the root of poverty and the consequences of poverty," Hughes said.

The group also discussed bills, such as H.B. 1523, that passed despite the professional organization's opposition.

"H.B. 1523 is of great concern to social workers because the profession is focused on creating and advocating for social justice for all, regardless of age, race, color, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability or national origin," Fisher said.

Hughes encouraged students to not be discouraged when bills are passed that they disagree with, but to instead get more engaged in local politics by attending Board of Aldermen meetings and writing their representatives when issues arise that affect their profession and the people they serve.

"Be informed, be engaged and be registered to vote," he said.

Hughes explained that to make a difference in policy and be agents of change, students should share real, genuine, direct and brief concerns with their lawmakers, using social media and personal emails.

"Make it personal," he advised. "Let me assure you, you will get a blanket response, but after a few people keep sending those kinds of emails, the politicians start having an 'a-ha moment.'

"It is very difficult for a policy maker to appreciate (your client's experience) if they've never dealt with it, unless you share it with them, and share it with them in a civil way; that is critical. No matter which side of the political spectrum you fall, or if you fall in the middle, attacks result in closed ears, whether you are in your political, personal or religious life."

Hughes warned students to pay close attention to local policy on the agenda ahead of city meetings to express concerns for their constituencies before it is too late.

He recounted a recent Board of Aldermen meeting where the lease for the only food pantry in Oxford was not renewed, resulting in The Pantry's need to find a new home.

"The board had to vote because of growth issues, but that is affecting real life," he said.

Hughes left the students with the charge to be a voice for the vulnerable populations they serve.

"No one will look out for the children you try to help unless they know the reality," he said.

For more information about the UM Department of Social Work, visit <http://sw.olemiss.edu/> or email [socialwork@olemiss.edu](mailto:socialwork@olemiss.edu).

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