Reflection 4

The legislation I selected for my intervention is Senate File 2293. This file intends to close the Iowa Historical Society Building in Iowa City. The current plan for relocating the records contained at the Iowa City location is a multi-tiered process. Many of the documents will be sent back to public organizations and religious institutions who keep their records there. Most of the documents will be relocated to the Des Moines location, but there will be serious issues concerning space and correct air control to preserve the documents. The plan to remedy this is to convert all of the physical media to digital, though a more explicit plan has not been established for this course of action. Some of the information will also simply be thrown away, with an estimated 60% of the material at the Iowa City location not making it to Des Moines.

Adam Zabner is the target of my advocacy, the house representative for Johnson County. Zabner is a first-generation Venezuelan American whose parents originate from Israel and Venezuela. He was born and raised in Iowa City, graduating from Iowa City High School in 2017 and grew an interest in Neuroscience. He conducted research as an assistant at University of Iowa and the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, until landing a job as an organizing intern for the campaign of Pete Buttigieg. From that point forward Zabner involved himself with the Democratic Party in Iowa as a regional organizing director. He won the primary and general election for the State House of Representatives in 2022, and claimed his seat in 2023, which he has held since.

I attended the NASW Legislative Day on the Hill last February 24th, which was when I carried out my legislative action. I was heavily informed about the process of meeting with a representative or a senator at the capitol building during a lecture. This process involved filling out a small note requesting the presence of the policymaker, submitting the note to a window near the legislative chamber, and waiting for the legislator or representative of the legislator to appear. I was informed that we may not get a chance to have such a conversation that day,

which diminished my hopes. I had done some research on Adam Zabner, but I had also done some on Tony Bisignano, a democratic senator, and was hoping to speak with him.

Near the end of the lecture, both Zabner and representative Ross Wilburn took the stage for some questions. I knew that this may be my only chance, so I took it, and raised my hand. The microphone made its way to me, and I addressed Zabner with Senate File 2293. His response was pretty unsatisfactory.

After a brief introduction and background, I asked, “Where are the court proceedings and decisions at, and when can we expect the day for voting?”

Zabner responded by giving an explanation of the bill to the audience (though he left out some finer details I would have included) and hammered down the importance of the bill. He spoke for roughly 4 minutes, but he did not once directly answer my questions.

I know now that the voting took place on the 4th of March, and that the bill has passed the Senate. The next day it was read in the House and referred to the State Government.

My action connects strongly to NASW Code of Ethics Standard 6.04, which emphasizes that social workers should engage in social and political action to ensure equal access to resources and advocate for policy changes that promote social justice. By attending the Legislative Day on the Hill and directly engaging with Adam Zabner about Senate File 2293, I involved myself with the political process in a way that aligns with this ethical responsibility. The potential closure of the Iowa City Historical Society Building raises concerns about access to historical resources, the preservation of cultural knowledge (such as newspapers my fiancee has dug up showing proof of black honors students and fraternities thriving at the university), and equitable access to information by and for the public. By asking my questions, I was advocating for transparency and accountability in policy making. Though, frustratingly, my question wasn’t answered, my attempt reflects the expectation that social workers remain aware and involved in the political decisions impacting the communities around us.

My process was culturally responsive in that I approached the issue with an understanding of how the closure of the Iowa City Historical Society Building could impact diverse communities and the preservation of their histories. The documents housed in the building include records from public organizations and religious institutions who struggle to find spaces they are financially capable of holding their records at. As mentioned above, there is a large mass of historical documentation concerning the lives of Black students at the University of Iowa, such as their intellectual and recreational clubs. By advocating against the loss of these materials, I was indirectly supporting the communities most affected by systemic racism.

Additionally, I engaged respectfully with Adam Zabner, knowing through my research of his background as a first generation Venezuelan American and his connection with Iowa City. Though I was not pleased with his response, I listened attentively to his answer. My conduct throughout the Legislative Day on the Hill was steeped in cultural responsiveness, as I carried myself professionally, employed respectful dialogue between my classmates, and provided space that values diverse perspectives.

I feel good about my participation during the Legislative Day on the Hill. I learned a great deal about the legislative process by getting a firsthand look at the Senate Floor as it was in the process of debating bills. I think that I carried myself respectfully and did my best to engage in the political process. I believe the State Government is an institution made for the people, by the people, meaning I have as much right to voice my opinions and concerns in the political process as any other citizen of the state of Iowa. I know that though my action did not seem to tip any needles, it was important for me to dip my toes in so I may take a full dive in my future work as a clinical social worker. I know now the physical environment that dictates the debate floor, the behaviors of those that inhabit it, and what methods of speaking are most influential in changing opinions. I still do not know what committees really do besides debating bills, like how they are debated and what are the most prevalent points of consideration.

What I learned about policy advocacy in this action was the amount of persistence needed to make a difference. The question I asked was only the first step, where my next step would have been talking to a Senator before they could vote on the bill. I did attempt to do this later in the day when I filled out a note to the senator I desired to communicate with. I originally was very emotional in my note, so much so I decided to scrap it and try again. This decision came from my learning in our class, which has taught me to recognize my emotions when they come up in group discussions, which include one on one discussions. I practiced deep breathing to center myself and write a more concise note that still got my point across.

I wish I would have known not to expect a meeting with a senator or representative, and not in the way of a large lecture hall with hundreds of others in attendance. I was very excited to voice my opinion, and was very downtrodden by the time we left and I never got a personal audience with anyone. In planning another policy action, I would attempt to address as many legislators as I could, in an effort to have an audience with at least one. My next step is to find another bill to get charged about and make a case for or against. Experience is the best teacher, so the more I try, the better known I'll become and the better I will be at communicating my ideas.