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Chicago Foster Care Advocate Recognized with Public Citizen of the Year Award

Chicago, IL— Every day the nation's 650,000 social workers act as advocates, champions, and leaders who make our society a better place to live. In continuation of this year's National Professional Social Work Month theme, "Elevate Social Work," 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 citizen being honored this year is statewide Public Citizen of the Year Awardee James McIntyre. **James McIntyre** became a ward of the state of Illinois after suffering over seven years of abuse at home. Unfortunately, like so many others in state care, foster care wasn't a better placement for James either, and he suffered continued trauma from sexual assaults while in care. While around 80% of aged-out foster youth in Illinois end up in corrections within five years, James chose a different path—he became an advocate for aged-out foster youth in Illinois. James helped to create Illinois' first chapter of the Foster Care Alumni of America where he served as chapter president for five years. James also served as the organization's unpaid lobbyist where he: pushed for (and ultimately passed) legislation that made foster youth documentation affordable to get; created a unified office within Illinois focused on breaking down silos; lobbied for legislation that improved communication between the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Illinois public schools; and even passed a bill that made clergy mandated reporters in all situations. James also testified on his own trauma in the foster system and helped NASW-Illinois Chapter lobby and pass the landmark 2018 foster youth tuition waiver bill which now provides aged-out youth a pass to a college degree. He did all of this while supporting himself working full-time for a local PetSmart. James now speaks to nonprofit agencies, serves on numerous taskforces and commissions around child welfare, and has become a go to resource on child welfare in Illinois.

In support of her nomination of James, mentor Leyda Garcia-Greenawalt wrote: "James has accomplished over 15 legislative initiatives. He has established relationships with many legislators, local politicians, and outstanding leaders. He is well respected in the foster community and is considered a true champion of change."

The NASW-Illinois Chapter is proud of the work of James McIntyre and others like him who fight every day for the underserved and underprivileged in Illinois. James is one of four individuals being honored at this year's NASW-Illinois Chapter Statewide Conference taking place November 5–7, 2019, at The Westin North Shore in Wheeling, IL. 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.