November 9, 2018

Dear AGE*SW* Members,

On behalf of the AGESW Board and myself as President of AGESW, we are responding to the strike occurring in Boston during GSA. The 2018 Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) is being held in Boston, MA at multiple locations, including the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center, the Boston Marriott Copley Place and the Sheraton Boston Hotel. There is an ongoing labor union strike with the Sheraton Boston Hotel specifically. Workers are striking for a livable wage from a single job (you can learn more from weblinks at the end of this letter).

A number of you have expressed concern and interest in AGE*SW*’s views on the matter, given our profession, and our numerous events at GSA/Sheraton. We know that the striking is occurring outside the Sheraton, but there have been some reports of activities also outside of the Marriott.

Our profession has a history of research, policy, practice and advocacy with the most vulnerable in our society. Since our founding, we have worked closely with unions to promote the rights of workers to voice their concerns about low wages and work conditions. Our code of ethics is clear that “a historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.”

All social workers are obligated to think critically about structural inequities and advocate for social justice. This strike is an opportunity to challenge us as social workers, representing numerous institutions of higher education, research centers, and community organizations, on the role of social work in interdisciplinary forums.

Reflecting our profession’s values and history, we encourage members to think carefully about the meaning for our profession of crossing the picket line.

What you can do:

1. **Venues**. AGE*SW* events at GSA are all being held at the Boston Marriott Copley Place and individual presentations by our members are being held across venues (Convention Center, Marriott and the Sheraton). The workers at the Boston Marriott Copley Place are not on strike, because they are not unionized.  Some conference attendees are choosing not to participate in events at the Marriott and Sheraton, while others will not cross the picket line specifically at the Sheraton, but will attend meetings and sessions at the Marriott. Such decisions are nuanced and complicated, often weighing issues of promoting access to educational opportunities and/or helping to raise awareness across disciplines on crucial issues in aging. While everyone will make their own choice about the responses to this strike, AGE*SW* supports the actions of members who choose not to present their research or participate in other activities because of the labor union strike.

We have members at every stage of their careers who need to know that we honor their choices.
2. **Dissemination of Research**. We are deliberating on strategies to help attendees

disseminate their research at GSA and after the conference. Initial ideas include webinars and working closely with GSA to help facilitate such efforts. A few members are exploring alternative venues (e.g., Boston Public Library or not-for-profit organizations) that have space and at no/little cost.

1. **Communication**. We acknowledge that accurate, timely information is needed to allow conference attendees to make informed choices regarding their involvement in this year’s annual meeting. In the meantime, we encourage you to engage in ongoing discussion with other GSA members via GSA Connect (<https://www.geron.org/stay-connected/gsa-connect>) and other established social media.
2. **Union Support**. We have been in touch with representatives from Boston’s Local 26 Union and learned that individuals can make a donation to the workers on strike (<https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/supportthestrike>). Union representatives have encouraged GSA members to not cross the picket line at the Sheraton.
3. **Support for Students and Emerging Scholars.** We are aware that students and emerging scholars may face particular difficulties when making their decisions. Please contact our president, Sara Sanders, if you encounter any specific difficulties that should be raised with GSA Leadership. Again, we are here to support our members at every stage of their career.

Our profession of social work is at a critical point to advocate for inclusion, social justice, and equity. We are part of a multidisciplinary society and this offers us an opportunity to critically reflect on our profession in context with others.

These developments are occurring quite quickly and many of us will be in Boston very soon. Pablo Freire’s notion of *praxis* includes reflection and action. While we may not have comprehensive solutions to address the systemic aspects of inequality, we are at a historical moment to reflect deeply on who are we are as individuals, professionals, and a community. And we remain open to action now and in the future.

Sincerely,

**To learn more:**

We refer you to information about the Local 26 Strike: [(https://www.local26.org/2018/10/boston-marriott-hotel-workers-on-strike)](https://www.local26.org/2018/10/boston-marriott-hotel-workers-on-strike%29)

The campaign, *One Job Should Be Enough,* includes advocating for a living wage and predictable employment, highlighting the challenges of the Green Choice program on workers’ schedules, and promoting equal decision making in use of technology in the future of the hotel industry. ([https://www.local26.org/category/press/](https://www.local26.org/category/press/%29)

Gov. Baker and other legislators support union workers: <https://www.local26.org/2018/11/massachusetts-political-leaders-delegate-marriott-management-call-for-meaningful-negotiations-to-end-strike/>

GSA’s responses to the situation: <https://www.geron.org/meetings-events/gsa-2018-annual-scientific-meeting/ceo-message-about-sheraton-strike>