

# Introduction

I HAVE A FEW CLARIFICATIONS BEFORE I BEGIN. FIRST, ALTHOUGH THIS BOOK lists “43 policies” in its title, this is actually false advertising. One chapter (on eugenic sterilization) focuses on state policies rather than one federal policy, the Pierce veto chapter discusses a proposal that was vetoed, and the chapter on Elizabethan Poor Laws describes the importance of this set of British regulations for the United States. In addition, the book ends with COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter (BLM). These topics were highly important and will continue to affect policies at various levels. They are not policies, but their recent importance necessitates their inclusion in this book. For the most part, though, I have tried to choose those specific policies that I believe are most important for social workers and other human services professionals to be aware of. Many of these policies are important in terms of eligibility for services, or the advancement of social and economic justice and others for their historical effect, or because of the discussions or controversies they give rise to.

Now, if one were to ask a group of rock music aficionados to name the 20 best rock albums or avid baseball fans to give you their list of the 10 best players, you would have spirited disagreement and contentious debate. There would perhaps be more disagreement than agreement. The same is true here. Although most policy instructors would support the inclusion of many of these policies in such a list, there would also be strong arguments for adding others or deleting some of these. I have tried to include the most important policies from the broad range of social work areas (child welfare, housing, aging, disabilities, mental health, and so on), but a number that I would like to have included missed the cut. I have included information on some of these within the related chapters or as follow-up questions in the Instructor Appendix (available by request; see Note to Instructors on page vii).

Approximately half of the book chapters include at the end an example of a policy analysis component in relation to the social problem or policy. In the Instructor Appendix, the second section for each chapter provides questions that require students to generalize particular analysis elements to that particular problem or policy. For some, such as policy goals, this is fairly straightforward. For other examples, however, such as horizontal versus vertical service delivery or social engineering, students might want to review the example provided before attempting to apply the analysis component to a different social problem or policy issue.

Most chapters in this book provide a brief historical overview of the issue or problem along with basic elements or goals of the social policy and some information on effectiveness. It is impossible to go into too much depth in a brief chapter, so I have tried to be as economical as possible. My goal is that the book provides a general introduction to important social welfare policies for students.

It is easy for students and practicing social workers to become callous about politics and policy in an era of increasing divisiveness that too often spills over into anger and contempt. Policies continue to guide both practice and funding; however, and for this reason alone, social workers need to remain policy advocates. Policy is incremental, and victories take time, but they do come with perseverance. As I write these words, the U.S. House of Representatives has just passed The Equality Act (H.R. 5—117th Congress: Equality Act, 2021), a bill that would ban discrimination against people on account of their gender identity or sexual orientation. It is a goal of President Biden to see this bill passed and signed into law during his first term. After more than a decade of stagnant wages and decreased purchasing power, it seems certain that the minimum wage will also finally be increased, although it is still unclear by how much. These gains in social or economic justice may seem painfully slow in coming, but the time and effort it takes to reach them can make them all the more sweet when they do come.