Statement on passage of SEA 480 – Gender Transition Procedures for Minors

On April 5, 2023, Governor Holcomb signed SB 480 into law. The legislation bans gender-affirming care for anyone under the age of 18 in Indiana. Specifically, the legislation:

1. Bans gender transition hormone therapy, puberty blockers and surgical procedures for anyone under the age of 18 in Indiana.
2. Requires gender-affirming hormone therapy to be discontinued by 12/31/2023. Specific language in the statue reads:
3. “A physician or practitioner within the practitioner’s scope of practice may continue to prescribe to an individual, who was taking a gender transition hormone therapy on June 30, 2023, as part of a gender transition procedure, gender transition hormone therapy until December 31, 2023. This subsection expires January 1, 2024.”
4. Allows for mental health and social services, but may limit the ability of mental health providers to make referrals to providers outside Indiana.
5. Exempts out hormone therapy/puberty blockers that are medically necessary for reasons other than gender transition.

While the legislation allows gender diverse Hoosiers under the age of 18 to continue to access mental health services, they will not be able to receive comprehensive, best practice care. We believe that mental health care is not enough.

Throughout the 2023 legislative session, the National Association of Social Workers-Indiana Chapter worked with other organizations to voice our opposition to the bill, lending our voice to hours of testimony in both the Indiana Senate and House from parents, professionals, allies, trans-gender youth and adults to share our opposition to the bill. We explained that:

1. Gender-diverse individuals have some of the highest rates of mental health, substance use concerns, and suicidal ideation of any minoritized group, and that comprehensive gender-affirming care is the only evidence-based intervention.
2. Gender-diverse youth receiving supportive medical services have mental health outcomes similar to youth who are not transgender.
3. The overwhelming consensus among major medical and mental health professional associations is that gender-affirming care is lifesaving, best-practice care for gender-diverse youth.
4. The NASW Code of Ethics requires social workers to act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group or class based on many attributes, including gender identity. In addition, it requires social workers to work in the best interest of our clients.
We want to thank everyone who connected with their legislators, every parent that spoke up for their child(ren), and every young person who spoke out and shared their story. These actions helped demonstrate that comprehensive gender-affirming care saves lives.

Through our work, NASW-Indiana will continue to amplify the voices of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals and to support them in all aspects of their lives. Diversity and inclusion are core components of social work ethics and at the heart of what we do. We want all those who identify as LGBTQIA2S+, and especially gender-diverse youth, to know that we see you and will continue to fight for you and your rights. All Hoosier children deserve access to the best evidence-based healthcare possible and we call on all social workers to work to eliminate such harmful discrimination now enshrined in Indiana law.

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