Regarding the Removal of Protections from Discrimination from the Social Work Code of Conduct

The Autism Society of Texas (AST) is disappointed and saddened by the unexpected removal of nondiscriminatory language from the Social Work Code of Conduct at the October 12, 2020 joint meeting of the Texas State Board of Social Work Examiners and the Behavioral Health Executive Council.

While we do not believe any social worker would choose to deny services to a person with a disability, having an explicit code of conduct helps guide and manage expectations for the industry and for those who rely on their help and guidance. We also believe that discrimination in any form is offensive and recognize that systemic homophobia and ableism is the exact reason that this Code of Conduct was created.

For those with autism, and those with disabilities in general, we rely on social workers to help navigate the overly complex federal and state systems of supports and services, we rely on them for mental health care, and we rely on them in crisis. We deserve to know that we can expect social workers to treat us fairly and equitably, regardless of who we are or who we love. There is a lot of trust that must develop in these relationships and the removal of this part of the Code of Conduct weakens that inherent trust.

The fact that social workers have adopted an inclusive code of conduct should be praised. This short statement is simply about fairness and equity: "a social worker shall not refuse to perform any act or service for which the person is licensed solely on the basis of a client's age; gender; race; color; religion; national origin; disability; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; or political affiliation."

Selectively removing disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression from this inclusive statement is wrong and unnecessary. Removing the expectations to treat everyone fairly absolutely implies that it is acceptable to discriminate against people with disabilities at a time when COVID-19 amplifies isolation and stress, and when there is widespread and devastating unemployment for people with disabilities. The disability community needs trusted expertise and guidance on how to access services and supports that are now so crucial.
We are also very concerned that this unexpected deletion appears to have circumvented public posting requirements and the Open Meetings Act. This law exists for exactly these instances when an arbitrary and capricious decision by a few affects so many. If not illegal, then this decision was certainly improper given the significant ramifications to our community.

Social workers are the foundation of the social support network and often the first person a family or an individual with a disability comes into contact with when seeking help. AST calls on the Texas State Board of Social Work Examiners and the Behavioral Health Executive Council to reverse the decision to remove these protections and leave the Code of Conduct as it stands in the future to ensure the continued safety and well-being of any person who asks a social worker for help.

Here are the ways you can also stand against this instance of homophobia and ableism:

2. Contact Your Representatives: https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home
3. Let the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council know that you oppose these changes: (512) 305-7700 or 1-800-821-3205 or general@bhec.texas.gov

The Autism Society of Texas (AST) works to improve the quality of life for all Texans with autism by offering innovative, person-centered support to people impacted by autism and their families. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects 1 in 54 Texans, as well as their parents, caregivers and friends. We offer assistance through a myriad of services and programs related to advocacy, recreation, education and support. We work in partnership with our community, seeking input from individuals with autism to advise our decision-making and offering comprehensive education and training so that communities may become more inclusive.