

ADVOCACY ALERT! STAND WITH TEXAS SOCIAL WORKERS

Friday, October 16, 2020

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See below under “What Can I Do?” for a new chance to testify next week on stripping disability protections from the Code.

First off, I want to say Wow. Just Wow. The response to the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (TSBSWE) change to the Code of Conduct for social workers has been amazing. We have heard from social workers and other concerned persons throughout the state and beyond in overwhelming ways. People are fired up. You can read [our official statement](#) and see our [previous advocacy alert](#) for more background on the issue.

Almost 5,000 people have signed our petition! [Check out and sign](#) the [change.org](#) petition here if you haven't done so already and continue sharing it on social media.

This story has blown up on the news: [Texas Tribune](#), [KRLD](#), [KXAN](#), [KSAT](#), [Dallas Morning News](#) (behind a paywall) and there are more stories coming. NASW knows of at least five letters that were sent to the Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC) and/or the Governor by a bipartisan group of legislators asking that the changes be pulled down or rescinded: Senator José Menéndez, Senator Beverly Powell, Representative Sarah Davis Representative and Mary Gonzalez, Chair of the LGBTQ Caucus. There are more coming as well, both from individual offices and groups of legislators. We will post them on [our website](#) as they become available. Please follow our [Twitter Advocacy account](#) @naswtx_advocacy and [Facebook page](#) for more updates.

Don't forget to tag your posts with the #StandWithTXSocialWorkers hashtag to show your solidarity!

**I STAND WITH
TEXAS SOCIAL
WORKERS**



I oppose removing any anti-discrimination protections from the
Texas Social Work Code of Conduct.

#StandWithTXSocialWorkers

Next, I'd like to extend a mea culpa, and be very clear that our advocacy very much extends to returning language regarding disability to the Code of Conduct. When I attended the meeting Monday October 12th I saw that the terms *disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression* were removed. Any discrimination towards a person with a disability would violate the ADA, or Sec. 504, or (at least for non-governmental social workers) Chapter 121 of the Texas Human Resources Code, assuming those laws applied to the individual, which is a fairly safe assumption. So our initial advocacy focused on the loss of the LGBTQ protections and very much glossed over the lack of disability protections, based on my awareness of protections in that area.

However, after deeper analysis and some very important conversations with advocates in the disability rights community, I now understand that by stripping away this language, the state created a situation where a social worker could *assume*, erroneously, that they can deny services to anyone with a disability.

This is huge, as we know the vulnerability of those in the disability community with a physical or mental health issue is a challenge for our state. There is also definite overlap with the LGBTQ community, and we may see someone marginalized even further. Our fight was always to restore all of the language that was taken out, but we must stand up for the disability community by recognizing that this specific change invites violation of the law.

What Can I Do?

- NASW/TX is working on talking points for the upcoming BHEC meeting on 10/27. We will send out meeting details as we have them. We also plan on putting on a statewide webinar open to all to share updates and prepare people for the 27th. **It looks like it will be at noon central time on Thursday October 22nd so save the date.** More info to come on how to register.
- In the meantime, the next opportunity to testify will be on October 22nd and October 23rd at the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. It will be two days, and you [can register at this link](#). There are opportunities to testify on both days, and if you'd like to speak email gcpd@gov.texas.gov by 8 am on October 21st and request which day you would like to be placed on the agenda.
 - Here are some bullets you can use in your testimony, but please customize it with your own points of view and examples. It will be a lot more powerful if they hear a diverse array of speakers rather than a whole lot of people saying the same thing. And please remember that the focus of this meeting is disability. You can raise concerns about the loss of LGBTQ protections at the BHEC meeting on the 27th.

- The changes to the Social Work Code of Conduct could create the impression that a social worker could refuse services to anyone with a disability
- The changes to the Social Work Code of Conduct could prevent a person from seeking services from a social worker because of a fear that they will be discriminated against due to a disability
- Cite [some stats](#) on disability to reinforce the needs of this large and diverse population, and frame your argument from a strength based perspective: this should be about expanding and not denying services for individuals who are living their own lives, and no one can be denied support or access based on any part of their identity
- Share any personal examples from your personal or professional life that might illuminate just how serious it would be for someone to withhold services based on their own beliefs

Beyond that, NASW/TX has taken nothing off the table. All options, be they around advocacy, regulatory changes or legal challenges are being discussed. This is a serious fight that may take a while. But we will keep working until the Code is restored. We have some amazing partners in this work, and the response from other organizations, groups and professions has been wonderful.

As always, If you're a member of NASW/TX thank you! You have been the muscle moving our advocacy. If you're not, we hope [you'll join](#), as your support is what allows us to harness the power of social workers across Texas.

Keep showing support on social media, let's share this far and wide! Use the hashtag #StandWithTXSocialWorkers.

Stay tuned for next steps and ways that NASW and its members are opposing this attack on vulnerable individuals outside of the rules process.