FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 26, 2020

Sen. Rodríguez asks Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council to Reverse Course on Eliminating Non-Discrimination Protections

EL PASO – State Sen. José Rodríguez sent a letter (attached) to the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC) asking them to reject a rule passed by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners that would no longer prohibit a social worker from refusing treatment based upon a person’s “disability; sexual orientation; [and] gender identity or expression.” The Social Worker Board approved the amended rule without public notice after a last-minute change was requested by the Office of the Governor.

Like many, I am gravely concerned about the substance of this change as well as the manner in which this action was taken, which seems inconsistent with state law.

While I have faith the vast majority of social workers will abide by their moral duty to treat all patients with dignity and respect, eliminating these protections sends a message to Texans with disabilities, Texans who identify as LGBTQ, and Texas women that they do not deserve equal treatment under the law.

Even one instance of discrimination against a patient due to disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression is unacceptable. The Council should exercise their power to return the rule to the Board for further review and public input.

According to state law, the BHEC must give final approval to any rules adopted by a professional board under their oversight if the rule affects the profession’s scope of practice or ethical standards. The rule change has drawn sharp criticism from social workers across the state and nation, including the National Association of Social Workers. BHEC will consider the issue tomorrow, Oct. 27 at 9 a.m. CDT.

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José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez is a member of the Senate Committees on Agriculture (Vice Chair); Natural Resources & Economic Development; Transportation; and Water & Rural Affairs. He also serves on the Senate Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention & Community Safety, which was formed on Sept. 4, 2019, after the mass shootings in El Paso and Midland/Odessa.