Tomorrow, 10/27, the Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC) will hold an open meeting on Zoom to discuss a variety of issues. This is a chance for social workers and others to share their thoughts, perspectives and feedback on the changes by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (TSBSWE) to the Social Work Code of Conduct. Check out our advocacy page for background info, additional resources, and letters from various legislators and other groups to give you a better scope on the changes. You can also watch last week’s Press Conference and Zoom Call to Action for a deeper dive into both the change and next advocacy steps.

You can view the full agenda here

Tuesday, October 27, 9am CDT

Access full details: View the meeting agenda, Zoom meeting link, and more here.

Join online: Visit https://zoom.us/j/92273545621

Call: (346) 248-7799 and enter the webinar ID 922 7354 5621

You do not need to pre-register. You can just log into the Zoom meeting at 9 am when the meeting starts. Item #4 on the agenda is likely of most interest to social workers seeking to make public comment:

4. Discussion regarding whether to initiate rulemaking to adopt non-discrimination requirements for licensees or, alternatively, to seek OAG opinion regarding agency’s authority to initiate rulemaking under current statutory authority.
Discussion regarding non-rulemaking actions that can be taken to preclude discrimination by licensees in the delivery of services.

Although there are some other issues (applying to test with ASWB, protocol on returning messages and calls, the Legislative Appropriations Request [LAR], etc.) that you may find interesting. There will be a chance for public comment at the end of the meeting.

So what should you expect? It will likely be a long day, as each speaker is allotted three minutes (although it is your choice whether to take all the time or not), and if the numbers that we expect to show up are there, then a lot of voices will get a chance to share their thoughts on the changes to the Social Work Code of Conduct. All sorts of steps could be taken: BHEC could decide to leave the amended rules in place, thus stripping anti-discrimination protections; they could return them back to the board for comment and review; they could recommend that the social work board reinstate the language; or it could be something else. We just don’t know, but that’s why it’s so imperative that anyone in opposition to this change show up and share.

Here are our suggested talking points and below are tips to make your testimony stand out:

- **Be Unique**: If NASW/TX released a script and everyone read the exact same thing it would get old really fast. The worst thing that could happen would be for the members of BHEC to tune out, and if everyone is saying the same thing verbatim, there’s a much greater chance of that. Instead of reading the talking points as is, incorporate them into your testimony. We want you to use the talking points linked above, but we included a whole lot for a reason: just grab three or four and leave the rest for others. We hope that all of them are spread out across the speakers and each one is tweaked to your perspective on this issue.

- **Make the Asks Clear**: There are really only two things we want here, and please share both. First, we want the anti-discrimination protections returned to the Code of Conduct, and for it to be restored to its previous form. Second, should we not get the first ask, BHEC needs to send the changes to the Code of Conduct back to the TSBSWE for public comment and a solution that will keep the protections in place.

- **Use Stories**: What really makes each testimony unique is the social workers that delivers it, as well as the focus on the clients that would be impacted by these changes. Talk about what the NASW Code of Ethics (English Spanish) means to you, and why our Code of Conduct needs to maintain the same anti-discrimination protections. Share your perspective on how this issue ties into a client’s right to self-determination. Or what it means to practice in a way where our beliefs don’t take precedence over access to services. Or what it would look like if a client thought that a social worker could turn them away. If you have a personal connection to the specific language being removed (disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression) feel free to share that, depending on your level of comfort. Connect with the members of BHEC on a human level by letting them know there are real implications to both providers and clients should these protections be removed.

- **Use Stats**: On the talking points we’ve included links to various sites with a variety of statistics on the vulnerability of these populations. This information can help drive home just how vital these protections are. One of my personal recs is hook with a story and then drive home the data. I found in my time at the Capitol that by leading with a story about people I could tap into the emotional response of my audience, and that often made the rational connection through the data more impactful. But this is your testimony, so craft it as you see fit.
- **Try Not to Repeat**: If you do hear someone else share similar testimony you can always keep it short and say you agree with so-and-so speaker, or change your own testimony to take a different path. Make it stand out and you will make it more memorable.

- **Be From Texas (or licensed here)**: We are in a new place with COVID, and virtual meetings make it easy for anyone to come and testify. But if you are a social worker and not licensed in Texas, or an advocate from someplace else, we ask that you not speak. Save this space for social workers and advocates who have that connection to this state, as external voices could dilute the message. Don’t Mess With Texas isn’t just an anti-littering campaign, it’s a culture this state projects, and there are plenty of ways for you to get involved (see our advocacy page) while still letting those in the state speak up.

Those are the highlights, but if you have questions you can reach out to me, the Executive Director of NASW/TX wfrancis.naswtx@socialworkers.org and I’ll try and help. This is the next best chance to restore the Code of Conduct, but if the outcomes Tuesday do not cover our two asks, we will keep this fight up. If it is sent back to the board, we’ll update you on how we can take the advocacy to the next TSBSWE meeting.

If you’re a member of NASW, thank you! Your input and energy have helped fuel this fight. If you’re not, then please know that no matter what, we’ll be working with our legislative partners on anti-discrimination legislation next session, and members make that possible. You can always join here to receive the latest updates and participate in many different ways. See you on the 27th,

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