



# STATEMENT FROM NASW-SC

## REGARDING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

How do we respond to this election?

This is something I've struggled with; as Chapter Executive Director, I work for ALL of our members. While many South Carolina social workers voted for Hillary Clinton, others voted for our President-Elect, Donald Trump. I believe that each of us voted in hope of a better future for our country; we chose different paths in hopes of reaching that goal.

As social workers, we can't help but be attuned to the divisiveness in our nation. For some, this has generated animated discussions about what is right and wrong with how our government works. These conversations are important and should continue. Yet for others, this conflict is expressed through violence. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports over 700 "hateful harassment" incidents since the election. Of those incidents: anti-immigrant (206), anti-Black (151), anti-LGBT (80), swastika vandalism (60), anti-Muslim (51), and anti-woman (36).

In South Carolina, we've had incidents that have left citizens fearful for their safety and their futures. I know a Hispanic professor who had a white supremacist note left on her porch ("Diversity equals white genocide.") Another Latino woman described going to a craft store and being told by another customer to "go back where she came from," even though she is now a US citizen. Columbia City Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine reported in an interview that a gay waiter in a local restaurant had this written on the tab by a customer: "No tips for fags. Trump's America." She also described recent calls about African American children being called names as they walked to school.

It seems the divisiveness in SC, like in other parts of the country, is bringing out our worst.

The NASW Code of Ethics demands that we "challenge social injustice." No matter which candidate we supported, we must oppose these acts of hate. Children, minorities, and any person of a different cultural background or sexual orientation deserves to feel safe. As social workers, we know this. Not only is it in the "code," it's in our DNA. So our task is this: how do we communicate a message of acceptance and kindness in a time of great tension?

It starts with our clients, colleagues and friends. We treat them with respect, and communicate that this is what they deserve from others. We give them a safe space to express the fear and anger they may feel. "It won't be that bad," or "You're overreacting" are not the right messages here, because we do face uncertainty about the future. Change is coming, and change results in uncertainty. How it will all play out, we've yet to see.

In terms of advocacy, the chapter will continue to focus on issues that affect us and the clients we serve. Protecting the Affordable Care Act, or at least the sections of it that are the most important, will be a priority. Supporting and fighting for positive changes in protective services at DSS (child AND adult) will be another focus, as potential cuts to entitlement programs will greatly affect this agency and the

clients they are tasked to serve. We will continue to advocate against human trafficking and educate others about its incidence in our state.

We also hope to work with legislators to promote a hate crime bill in SC; we are one of five states that do not have a hate crime law, and now, more than ever, it is needed. We will also remain vigilant about any potential legislation that discriminates against LGBT people, refugees, or those of non-Christian faith, because our code tells us we must act “with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed” individuals or groups. If you wish to participate in our advocacy efforts, contact the chapter office. If you want to understand better what you can do in your own practice, we’d like to hear from you. If you have ideas about ways the chapter can better address these issues, we’d like to hear that, too.

The social worker theme for next year, as chosen by National NASW, is “Social Workers Stand Up.” It couldn’t be more appropriate. And we will STAND UP—because our clients, our communities, and our country need that from us.