



WORDEN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

The Worden School of Social Service (WSSS) at Our Lady of the Lake University, the oldest school of social work in Texas, which for the last 78 years has trained, educated, and socialized social workers, unequivocally condemns the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners' (TSBSWE) decision to accept the language provided by the governor of Texas, removing protections against discrimination for disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression from the Social Work Code of Conduct.

As a program within a Catholic institution, WSSS finds further affirmation for our position from the statement of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) which supports our belief that there should never be a law that endorses unethical and discriminatory behavior in social work practice. In "Always Our Children," the USCCB makes it clear that the fundamental human rights of all people must be defended against injustice and oppression.

Politicians should not interfere with the mission, ethics, and code of conduct of a profession that is rooted in advancing social and economic justice for vulnerable populations or anyone in need. The governor's office claim that the code's original nondiscriminatory protections go beyond the protections afforded by state law but forgets that TSBSWE has explicit statutory authority to propose and adopt rules regarding the scope of social work practice, as well as its standards of care and ethics. This inarguably extends to anti-discriminatory protections under the Social Work Code of Conduct.

The removal of this language facilitates skewed perceptions about what is just and ethical and delivers the wrong message that discrimination against these (or any) particular groups is allowable under the rule of law. The consequences for these populations will be detrimental. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in Texas 25.5% of adults have some type of disability. Individuals with a disability often experience barriers when it comes to health care, and policies are noted to be among those barriers according to the World Health Organization. Additionally, according to the Williams Institute, there are nearly one million individuals in Texas who identify as LGTBQ. This vulnerable population experiences struggles in gaining access to services for mental health and other essential health care services, and even when services are available, barriers and experiences of discrimination in gaining access still exist. Therefore, laws must be instated to protect these historically marginalized communities from suffering further discrimination.

The WSSS joins the National Association of Social Workers Texas Chapter (NASW/TX) in calling on the governor to rescind his overreach into the Social Work Code of Conduct and to TSBSWE to reinstate these protections. Furthermore, WSSS calls on all social workers, as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the NASW Code of Ethics, to endorse and sign the petition titled, "I Stand with Texas Social Workers." The petition is available at this link:<https://www.change.org/p/texas-governor-oppose-changes-to-the-code-of-conduct-for-socialworkers-in-texas>

We stand with all social workers calling for ethical and non-discriminatory policies, and we reject any governmental institution or politician imposing their agenda on our profession.

-- The Worden School of Social Service Faculty and Staff