CSWE Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression

Statement on Antitransgender Bills

The members of the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE’s) Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE) stand firm in opposing the recent blatantly transphobic actions taken by Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

On February 22, 2022, Gov. Abbott issued a [directive](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/O-MastersJaime202202221358.pdf) to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) commissioner mandating that child welfare workers are to investigate parents for child abuse if they support their trans children through gender-affirming treatments (Ghorayshi, 2022).This order goes against the principles of social work education. We are committed, as educators, to preparing social work students to “engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice”(CSWE, 2015, p. 8). We also help students learn to apply their knowledge of the importance of diversity, difference, and an individual’s identity in their practice (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). This order is also in direct violation of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Additionally, the directive goes against contemporary evidence-based medical and mental health standards of care set by several national and international organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. Furthermore, it was based on a nonbinding legal opinion. So, while the legal definitions of abuse and neglect that underscore the court decision-making process in determining the best needs of a child remain the same, the order will create an atmosphere of fear and potentially lead to unnecessary DFPS investigations that are inherently traumatic.

This move occurs within a larger social context as more states are passing harmful legislation that cannot be ignored wherein trans-identified children and their families find themselves the focus of an "intentional, coordinated attack” (Bailey, 2022). This year is trending toward a historic high for antitrans legislation, with 18 states that have active antitrans policies under consideration(American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). In 2021 a record 147 bills passed that drastically restrict transgender individuals’ access to health care(Bailey, 2022), public access[[1]](#footnote-2) (Sprayregen, 2021), and athletics[[2]](#footnote-3) (Avery, 2021; Kotch, 2021). One example of bills being proposed or passed this year is Arkansas Act 626, which bans all gender transition treatment including puberty-blocking drugs (SAFE Act, 2021).

Proponents of antitrans bills are also now pushing to erase LGBTQ education. For example, Florida recently passed the [Parental Rights in Education](https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1557/?Tab=BillText) or Don’t Say Gay bill, which awaits Gov. Ron DeSantis’ signature. It forbids lessons and classroom discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade. Even when not passed, these harmful bills contribute to a hostile environment that places trans lives up for public discourse and perpetuates LGBTQ stigma.

As social workers and educators, we believe in the inherent value of treating people with dignity and respect. We are committed to preparing students to understand “how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity” (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).Further, we teach students that dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of sexual orientation and gender identification—as well as many other factors such as race, political ideology, and class.

This includes the standpoint of trusting and supporting trans people as they are and actively working to remove barriers to care through an informed consent and gender-affirming model (Kinney et al., 2020). Policies that create barriers to gender-affirming care contribute to experiences of discrimination, mental anguish, and suicidal ideation.

As educators, we must commit to integrating policy work throughout our curricula, as state and federal policy dictate social work practice at all levels. Here are some examples:

* Assign students to contact their local legislators to advocate for social and economic justice on more than one occasion, such as asking for a commitment to oppose the current antitrans proposed bills.
* Include policy affecting LGBTQ communities in classroom discussions and assignments.
* Become adept at disrupting harmful discourse and critically facilitating uncomfortable discussions (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019), such as how religious protections/exemptions (i.e., Religious Freedom Restoration Act) have been used to discriminate against LGBTQ people.

See the CSOGIE resources and references at the end of this document for more information.

The NASW *Social Work Speaks* (NASW, 2021) position statement also makes it very clear that as social workers, we must actively

* repeal discriminatory legislation, regulations, and institutional policy to protect the rights, legal benefits, and privileges of people of all gender identities and expressions; and
* ensure open availability of comprehensive health, mental health, and social supports for transgender people and their families.

The CSWE CSOGIE council members ask you to join us in the following pledge:

We, the co-signed, commit to ensuring that social work educational curricula include culturally responsive trans-inclusive knowledge and skills, actively opposing antitransgender and anti-LGBTQ legislation. We also commit to fighting for inclusive policies that provide protections for all LGBTQ individuals.

Please add you name and credentials below; pronouns are optional.

In solidarity,

M. Killian Kinney, PhD, MSW, LSW (they/them)

Gina R. Rosich, PhD, MSW

Darren L. Whitfield, PhD, MSW

Jama Shelton, PhD, MSW (they/them)

CSOGIE Resources

* [The NAME Steps](https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/CSOGIE/6861_cswe_CSOGIE_TheNAMESteps_Guide_WEB72_REV2.pdf)
* [Guidelines for Affirmative Social Work Education](https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/fec58b0a-d26e-431f-8b14-3ddb1c0aab05/Guidelines-for-Affirmative-Social-Work-Education-LGBQQ_final_WEB.pdf)
* [Guidelines for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) Affirmative Education](https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/e95d6dce-9e22-4c1f-a7af-374d398fd8de/Guidelines-for-Trasngender-and-Gender-Nonconforming-(TGNC)-Affirmative-Education-CSOGIE_WP2_TGNC_final_web.pdf)
* [How to Talk About Sexual Orientation Change Efforts in Social Work Education](https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/df7011d0-86ae-46ea-96c2-92cddd1aec01/HowtoTalkAboutSexualOrientationChangeEffortsinSocialWorkEducation.pdf)
* [Social Work Students Speak Out! The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Students in Social Work Programs](https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/0ef9a3a4-c828-41b5-8f31-4ef65c5dd4d7/Social-Work-Students-Speak-Out!-_final_web_REV1.pdf)
* Shelton, J. & Dodd, S. (2020). Beyond the binary: Addressing cisnormativity in the social work classroom. *Journal of Social Work Education, 56*, 179–185. [doi:10.1080/10437797.2019.1648222](https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1648222)
* Shelton, J., Kroehle, K., & Andia, M. (2019). [The trans person is not the problem: Brave spaces and structural competence as educative tools for trans justice in social work.](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol46/iss4/7/) *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 46*(4), 97–123.
* Wagaman, A., Shelton, J., & Carter, R. (2018). Queering the social work classroom: Strategies for increasing inclusion of LGBTQ people and experiences. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. 166-182. [doi:10.1080/08841233.2018.1430093](https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2018.1430093)

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[Arkansas Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act](https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Acts/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2021R%2FPublic%2F&file=626.pdf&ddBienniumSession=2021%2F2021R), Fla. Stat. § 626 (2021)

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1. See, e.g., “[Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act](https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Acts/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2021R%2FPublic%2F&file=626.pdf&ddBienniumSession=2021%2F2021R), Ark. Code Ann. § 20-9-1501 *et seq.*, 2022; “[Medical Ethics and Diversity Act](https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Acts/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2021R%2FPublic%2F&file=462.pdf&ddBienniumSession=2021%2F2021R)”, A.C.A. § 17-80-501 *et seq.,* 2022). An increasing number of “bathroom bills” are passing in multiple states. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See, e.g., [Gender Integrity Reinforcement Legislation for Sports (GIRLS) Act](https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/FTPDocument?path=%2FBills%2F2021R%2FPublic%2FSB450.pdf), A.C.A. § 16-130-101 *et seq.* (2022); eight such laws with virtually identical language went into effect in seven states. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)