



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

Response to Recent Anti-LGBTQIA+ Legislation and Guidance for Supporting Students

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) condemns the recent push to further oppress, marginalize and dehumanize LGBTQIA+ individuals within various states.

In 2021, more than 30 states introduced over 150 anti-LGBTQIA+ pieces of state legislation (Gutmacher Institute, 2022). Many of these laws were developed to discriminate against trans youth in sports and limit access to gender affirming care, and unfortunately 15 of them were enacted. These attacks on queer youth have continued to occur in 2022 and some have gotten more attention than others. According to the Human Right Campaign (HRC) “we’re seeing bans on gender-affirming medical care, bans on books with LGBTQ+ characters, bans on participation in sports, bans on talking about LGBTQ+ people in schools and investigating adults who provide care for trans kids as child abusers” (Oakley, 2022). The HRC is currently tracking almost 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills moving through state legislatures.

This week (March 7 - 9, 2022), both the Florida House of Representatives and Senate voted to pass HB 1557/SB 1834, the Parental Rights in Education Bill, also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill. This bill restricts school teachers and staff from discussing sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity with students. This will impact their ability to provide accurate and vital education on health, history, literature, and both the oppression and resilience of LGBTQIA+ people. Similar bills have been introduced in states across the country, along with numerous bills intended to restrict teachers and school staff from discussing systemic racism (Gabriel & Goldstein, 2021; PEN America, 2022). LGBTQIA+ youth and their families are also the target of a recent directive from Governor Greg Abbot of Texas instructing the Department of Family and Protective Services to investigate families who provide their children with gender-affirming care. SSWAA continues to be impressed and inspired by the activism of youth throughout the states of Florida and Texas, and across the country who speak out against hate and ensure that their voices are heard.

SSWAA believes all students, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, should be afforded an equal educational opportunity in a safe and supportive school environment. SSWAA opposes recent legislation that attempts to prevent youth from learning about the existence, resilience, and accomplishments of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as the attempts to prevent them from learning about the historical and current impacts of racism and systemic oppression. Racism and queerphobia are connected and these laws will negatively impact all students, especially those with intersecting identities. SSWAA also stands in agreement with experts across the country who know that attacks on gender-affirming care are in direct contrast with medical standards of care, contribute to stigma and hate of LGBTQIA+ people,

and negatively impacts the mental health of queer youth (Hughes, et al., 2021). Students should be able to attend school without fear of threat, harassment, and denial of rights. All students have a right to a safe and supportive school climate that honors their dignity and worth as individuals and respects their families. In addition, our ethical responsibility to the broader society requires school social workers to advocate for social justice, changes in policy to improve social conditions and to promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally.

SSWAA stands in solidarity with our LGBTQIA+ communities and will continue to be leaders in advocating for social justice at a federal level and providing support to states. School Social Workers have the skills, expertise, and relationships with students and families necessary to support them as they react to these recent political offenses. School Social Workers can also empower students and families and work with them to advocate and make changes at the policy level.

For more information and resources on how to support queer and questioning youth, and advocate for legislative change, please refer to the [SSWAA Position Paper Promoting the Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ Students](#) as well as a 2020 SSWAA blog post, [Supporting Queer Youth in Schools Using a MultiTiered Approach](#).

References and Additional Resources

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