



## **Leading Mental Health Organizations Urge an End to Harmful 'Religious Freedom' Laws**

**April 20, 2016** – The nation’s leading mental health professional organizations are expressing dismay over the spate of recent bills and laws that would allow for individuals and businesses to deny services, employment and housing to LGBT people under the guise of religious freedom. Other states are proposing and enacting laws that would require transgender people to use public restrooms based on their sex assigned at birth. Also of serious concern is a bill recently passed by the Tennessee General Assembly that would allow mental health professionals to deny services to LGBT people based on a counselor’s religious beliefs.

These bills and laws run counter to the adopted policies of our organizations, which essentially state that we do not condone discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, or physical or emotional disability.

### **Discrimination Negatively Affects Mental Health**

Studies confirm that discrimination, bias and prejudice have negative consequences on one’s mental health and overall well-being. Specifically, research has linked anti-LGBT discrimination to increased risk of depression, anxiety and substance use. And studies show that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are up to six times more likely to attempt suicide while 41 percent of transgender people report having made a suicide attempt.

It is important to note that several studies also show marked increases in overall physical and mental health when governments enact laws and policies, such as the executive orders recently signed by Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf that strengthen equality for LGBT people. Community and family acceptance has also been shown to contribute significantly to fewer occurrences of depression, anxiety and suicidality for LGBT youth.

Our organizations have strong ongoing commitments to promote the health and well-being of LGBT adults and youth; to eliminate violence against LGBT people; and to support full equality in areas such as marriage, employment, housing, public accommodation, military service, licensing, parenting, adoptions and access to legal benefits.

We urge states to reject these harmful and discriminatory bills and to repeal such laws that have already passed.

**American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 36,500 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders.

**American Psychoanalytic Association:**

The American Psychoanalytic Association is a professional organization of psychoanalysts with approximately 3,300 active members. The Association is comprised of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, educators, researchers, and students who have an interest in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic therapy. Visit [www.apsa.org](http://www.apsa.org) for more information.

**National Association of Social Workers:**

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with 130,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy.

**American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work:**

The American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work promotes psychoanalytic education, advances clinical social work, facilitates the production and dissemination of knowledge, and advocates for high standards of practice.

**The American Family Therapy Academy:**

The American Family Therapy Academy (AFTA) is a non-profit professional association of the leading family therapy teachers, clinicians, program directors, policy makers, researchers, and social scientists dedicated to advancing systemic thinking and practices for families. AFTA's mission is to develop, research, teach and disseminate family therapy theory and practice in the context of a core commitment to equality, social responsibility and justice, with particular attention to marginalized and underserved groups.

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