Texas Jewish Family Service Agencies oppose Gov. Greg Abbott’s directive to investigate gender-affirming treatments as child abuse

For Immediate Release – February 24, 2022

Texas agencies including Jewish Family Service of Greater Dallas, Shalom Austin Jewish Family Service, Jewish Family Service Houston, and Jewish Family Service of San Antonio stand together in opposition to any efforts to change the definition of child abuse to include “gender-affirming care” as referenced in the Texas Attorney General’s non-binding opinion KP-0401 released on February 18, 2022, as well as Gov. Abbott’s February 22, 2022 letter to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Commissioner directing DFPS to investigate such accusations. These continued attempts to change the definition of child abuse are in direct opposition to our values and principles and pose danger to transgender youth and their families.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott [issued this directive](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/O-MastersJaime202202221358.pdf) ordering DFPS to investigate reports of “gender-transitioning procedures” as child abuse.

The letter also states, “Texas law imposes reporting requirements upon all licensed professionals who have direct contact with children who may be subject to such abuse, including doctors, nurses, and teachers, and provides criminal penalties for failure to report such child abuse. See id. §§ 261.101(b), 261.109(a-1). There are similar reporting requirements and criminal penalties for members of the general public. See id. §§ 261.101(a), 261.109(a).”

Our agencies, in coordination with the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies, are opposed to this state action as it could deny life-saving care for transgender youth and cause a direct negative effect on their mental health and well-being during adolescents’ highly formative years.

Many transgender individuals already experience stigma and discrimination, harassment, and violence simply because of who they are. As mental health and social service agencies that serve all in need, we are committed to ensuring the safety, confidentiality, and well-being of the children and adolescents we help and are concerned that state leaders are putting their political goals and biases above these transgender children and their families’ civil and equal rights.

The Social Work Code of Ethics provides a framework for professionals to empower and support the self-determination of all people, as well as engage in conversations about identity. Those conversations within a therapeutic relationship should never be defined as child abuse.

Our collective network, along with several agencies, including the National Association of Social Workers Texas and transgender advocacy organizations like Equality Texas, continues to urge Texas leadership to heed the advice of the legal, medical, and mental health professionals about how these proposed actions would endanger youth and families as well as negatively impact the licensed professionals who serve as mandatory reports of child abuse. This non-binding legal opinion does not require DFPS to implement modifications to its current practices and rules which guide the investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect in Texas. We, therefore, ask the DFPS leadership team to stand in support of all Texas children and families by rejecting this harmful and discriminatory opinion.

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