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## STATE SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION AWAITS WISCONSIN SUPREME COURT DECISION ON CONVERSION THERAPY BAN

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**Madison, WI** - The National Association of Social Workers Wisconsin Chapter (NASW-WI) looks forward to the Wisconsin State Supreme Court's hearing of oral arguments in *Tony Evers v. Howard Marklein* on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The Court's final decision on this case could reaffirm the ability of Wisconsin professions to set their own Conduct Code as well as stop the extremely harmful practice of conversion therapy.

NASW-WI has been working for seven years to ban conversion therapy in the Conduct Code for social workers, marriage and family therapists and professional counselors. The proposed Conduct Code rule, which would protect clients from this harmful, discredited, unethical practice, has repeatedly been suspended by the Joint Committee on the Review of Administrative Rules.

The continuous suspensions of this rule represent a legislative overreach in the rule-making process and threaten the ability of professions in Wisconsin to create their standards. As outlined in state statutes Section 15.08 (intro.) and (b)) and a June 2020 Legislature Memo, professional boards can create ethical standards. Section 457.03 (2) (intro) and (b) Statutes provide that authority to the Examining Board of Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling, and Social Work.

Conversion therapy is a discredited and extremely harmful practice that attempts to cause an individual identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender-nonconforming ("LGBT") to abandon that identity and adopt and/or exhibit a heterosexual sexual orientation and gender identity consistent with the one assigned to them at birth.

Experts have described the practice as torture. Conversion therapy has included, both historically and today, enforcing rigid gender roles through talk therapy, repeating homophobic or transphobic slurs, isolation from friends and family, "corrective" rape, exorcism, and aversion "therapies" such as using electrical shock devices or nausea-inducing medication to induce a negative response to stimuli associated with being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas C. Haldeman, The practice and ethics of sexual orientation conversion therapy, 62 Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 221-227 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.62.2.221>.

The practice is associated with increased depression, psychological distress, substance use, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts as well as lower educational attainment and lower weekly incomes.<sup>2</sup>

To learn more, visit the webpage dedicated to NASW-WI's work on banning conversion therapy [here](#).

About The National Association of Social Workers Wisconsin Chapter:

*Founded in 1955, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with more than 120,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.*

*NASW-WI's mission* is to foster community by advancing the profession through education, ethics, professional standards, and advocacy to serve diverse populations.

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<sup>2</sup> Jake Camp, Silia Vitoratou, & Katharine A. Rimes, LGBTQ+ self acceptance and its relationship with minority stressors and mental health: A systematic literature review, 49 Archives of Sexual Behavior 2353 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01755-2> ; Anna Forsythe et al, Humanistic and economic burden of conversion therapy among LGBTQ youths in the United States, 176 JAMA Pediatrics 493 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.0042> ; Amy Przeworski, Emily Peterson, & Alexandra Piedra, A systematic review of the efficacy, harmful effects, and ethical issues related to sexual orientation change efforts, 28 Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice 81 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/cpsp.12377> ; Caitlin Ryan, Russel B. Toomey, Rafael M. Diaz, & Stephen T. Russell, Parent-initiated sexual orientation change efforts with LGBT adolescents: Implications for young adult mental health and adjustment. 67 Journal of Homosexuality 159 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1538407>.