

diversity, equity, & inclusion

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

Nurses as Advocates for LGBTQIA+ Policy Change

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June was celebrated nationwide as LGBTQIA+ Pride Month. Events throughout the month celebrated the identities of the LGBTQIA+ community. Pride this year was significant as legislation attacking LGBTQIA+ Americans has reached record levels, more than doubling the number of bills introduced last year.

Recent Events

The American Civil Liberties Union is currently tracking 491 anti- LGBTQIA+ bills across the nation, and over 70 have already passed into law (ACLU, 2023). Education and health-related bills make up a large portion. While not exhaustive, these bills fall into several categories:

- Access to healthcare, such as Medicaid for transgender adults and gender-affirming care bans for transgender youth, and reproductive rights attacks.
- Public accommodations, such as banning transgender folks from using public restrooms and locker rooms.
- Schools and education, such as forced outing bills, bans on transgender youth in sports, anti-DEI curriculum and training bans, “anti-woke” legislation, and bills targeting “divisive concepts” or critical race theory.
- Free speech and expression, such as drag bans and book bans.
- Civil rights, such as weakening nondiscrimination laws.

Why Should Nurses Get Involved?

Nurses are well positioned to advocate for vulnerable populations and offer witness testimony that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of government. As educators and providers of care, nurses see the impact social determinants of health have on those of sexual or gender minorities (SGM). Discrimination is still experienced in employment and healthcare. Transgender women of color are especially vulnerable to poverty and violence and SGM youth often experience harassment in schools (Cahill, 2020).

Disinformation regarding gender-affirming care for transgender youth, for example, is rampant. The Nursing Code of Ethics holds the profession to practice with compassion and respect for

all people while advocating for the protection of rights, the promotion of safety, and the creation of health policy. Nurses are charged with a commitment towards the vulnerable, to social justice and to being agents of positive change (ANA, 2015). Therefore, it is the responsibility of nursing to endure that they use their knowledge of evidenced based research to inform lawmakers as they develop legislation on critical topics such as gender-based care.

How Can Nurses Get Involved?

Nurses can get involved in policy promotion in a variety of ways. Once a piece of legislation is proposed and assigned to a committee, nurses can begin calling committee members to let them know their thoughts on the proposal and ask them to vote in a particular way. Calling a representative after hours and leaving a voicemail is an easy way to dip your toe into advocacy work while building confidence.



A deeper way to get involved is to review a policy proposal and submit written testimony. This can be done as a proponent, opponent, or interested party and is a meaningful way to demonstrate how nurses can provide their expert opinion while advocating for vulnerable populations.

Testimony can also be presented to the committee in person. Before doing this, one should have a thorough understanding of the proposed legislation and its impact and be ready to answer questions from the committee. Often, legislators appreciate hearing from members of the public, however this may not be the case, especially if the topic is politically contentious, such with the anti-LGBTQIA+ and DEI legislation.

A more intimate way to promote policy and build relationships with lawmakers is to meet with them personally. Many organizations plan “advocacy days” to discuss topics and ask for legislation that aligns with targeted interests. However, anyone can ask to set up a meeting with their elected representative by contacting their office. Conversations with lawmakers or their legislative aides are often rewarding and help officials understand additional perspectives as they consider legislation.

Nurses are well positioned to advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community. While Pride month may come to an end, keep the support alive and consider extending support to the community through support for and promotion of policies and practices that reduce harm and improve affirmative care.

References

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