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July 20, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

As mid-summer arrives, we continue actively planning for the 2023 annual conference in Phoenix, Arizona and are grateful to the authors who submitted more than 2,000 abstracts, and the many abstract reviewers and cluster chairs essential to this process.

In April we noted the complex political environment in Arizona and some thoughts on how we might engage in this setting. With the June 24, 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that led to overturning *Roe v. Wade* we again recognize that any State of Arizona actions to outlaw or limit abortion rights are likely to be concerning to our members. These actions, of course, are not specific to Arizona but may raise the question: Why would SSWR hold a conference in a setting that has enacted (and may continue to enact) laws contrary to social work commitments in the areas of racial justice, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive freedom?

As many of you know, the SSWR Board selects venues years in advance and signs contracts that carry financial obligations. The Board cannot fully predict what the political actions will look like at the time the conference is held. Moreover, in no setting in the U.S. are political activities and policy actions monolithic. There are important voices fighting for compassion, justice, and equity in all settings. That is certainly the case in Arizona. By holding our conference in Phoenix, we believe we can serve as a vehicle to elevate those voices.

Most importantly, however, is that schools of social work are present in each of the fifty states and social work researchers are conducting research in each of these states. We are highly reluctant to only select settings that have a visible progressive agenda. This isolates our conference – and our scholarship – from numerous challenging issues. It can also limit the conference attendance opportunities of many members who live in these regions.

We do take the setting of our conference seriously and recognize members may have a variety of perspectives on these issues. The Board is engaging in several actions to be responsive:

1. *We have established a committee on conference site selection to provide parameters to inform future decisions.* Issues of site selection have come up in previous years (and will again in years to come). An earlier committee produced a document to offer guidance on site selection. We are in the process of reviewing and updating this document. Members will have an opportunity to provide input in the coming months via a portal on the website for questions and comments. We will also add this as an agenda item to the membership business meeting at the conference in 2023 and beyond so that we can directly hear from members on this issue.
2. *We are planning options to offer a partially hybrid conference format for 2023 and future conferences.* By this action, members whose ethical objections to

attending in person and women who may have health considerations in the face of abortion restrictions can choose to attend at least some parts of the conference virtually. We had begun planning for greater hybrid possibilities regardless of the conference venue to allow greater participation by community partners, international participants, and others who may have travel or cost barriers to attending an in-person conference. The current climate across the U.S. has led us to accelerate these hybrid options.

3. *We continue to seek opportunities to engage in action while at the conference.* These include: (a) bringing attention to the outstanding research of our members that can inform policy actions and social work practice. (b) seeking guidance from the social work community in Arizona regarding advocacy efforts. (c) providing conference attendees options on how they might spend their time and money while in Phoenix that furthers causes related to social justice.

The value of social work research is acutely needed in these times. The SSWR annual conference assures that this research is highlighted and part of the national dialogue on issues of social justice. We look forward to your participation in the conference – whether in person or virtually – as we collectively advance research-informed solutions to societal challenges.

If you would like to provide input or have questions for the SSWR Board, please respond to at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023phoenix>.

Sincerely,

Sean Joe, PhD
President