

March 15, 2023

RE: S. 103: An act relating to amending the prohibitions against discrimination.

Dear Chair Hinsdale and Members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development,
Housing and General Affairs:

As the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Vermont Chapter (NASW VT). I am writing to express our support for S. 103: an act related to amending the prohibitions against discrimination. S. 103 will help to combat systemic discriminatory practices. The social work profession strives to reform discriminatory practices and envisions a society that values the input of all its members regardless of their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of birth, age, crime victim status, or physical or mental condition.

NASW views any level of discrimination as objectionable. The new language in S. 103, "...to provide that harassment need not be severe and pervasive to constitute unlawful discrimination" supports current views on discriminatory practices. There has been a shift in social norms and perspectives around harassment. In 1998, only 38% of Americans believed that sexual harassment was a problem that needed to be taken seriously. Data collected in 2017 demonstrates the shift in this belief, with 86% of those Americans polled endorsing a "zero-tolerance" policy for sexual harassment. As these societal norms shift, our laws should follow.

In addition, the elimination of the requirement to follow an internal grievance procedure as well as demonstrate different treatment of another employee will eliminate the barriers that only serve to prevent reporting.

We also fully support the application of the new definition of harassment to both the employment and public accommodations laws. We do not believe there should be a carve-out for educational settings, and we look forward to continuing to collaboratively work towards addressing discrimination and harassment in all settings.

Thank you for your work on this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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