

We are aware of the complex political environment in Nashville, Tennessee and have thoughts on how we can engage in this setting. For those who may not know, the state of Tennessee has passed a series of bills that discriminate against the LGBTQIA+ community, including SB 126 (HB 1027) – a bill that unnecessarily regulates life-saving, best practice medical care for transgender youth., HB 1182 (SB 1224), a business bathroom bill that requires businesses that don't actively prevent transgender people from using the restroom consistent with their gender identity to post a sign warning that transgender people might be inside; SB 228, an anti-transgender sports ban; SB 1229, a sweeping anti-LGBTQ education bill; and HB 1233, an anti-transgender student bathroom bill that denies transgender students access to the bathroom and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity and makes schools liable if a student believes they have shared a sex-segregated space – bathrooms, locker rooms or other changing facility – with a transgender student.

As a result, some states have placed state-funded travel restrictions on state employees.

These actions, of course, while specific to Tennessee, may raise the question: Why is AUCCCD holding a conference in a setting that has enacted (and may continue to enact) laws contrary to our commitment to LGBTQIA+ rights?

As many know, the AUCCCD leadership selects venues years in advance and signs contracts with financial obligations. Therefore, we cannot fully predict what political actions will emerge or occur prior to the conference. Moreover, in no setting in the U.S. are political activities and policy actions monolithic. Important voices are fighting for compassion, justice, and equity in all locations. This is certainly the case in Tennessee. By holding our conference in Nashville, we believe we can serve as a vehicle to elevate those voices.

Most importantly, however, is that AUCCCD attendees and their institutions are present in all fifty states. Therefore, we are reluctant to select only settings that have a visible progressive agenda. This isolates our conference – and our scholarship on inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and belonging – from numerous challenging issues. It can also limit the conference attendance opportunities for those living in these regions.

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

1. ***We are examining our conference site selection process to provide additional parameters to inform future decisions.*** Site selection issues have arisen in previous years (and will continue in years to come).
2. ***We continue to seek opportunities to engage in action while at the conference.*** These include: (a) bringing attention to the outstanding presentations of our members that can inform policy actions, research, teaching, and practice. (b) seeking guidance from the local community in Tennessee regarding advocacy efforts. (c) providing conference attendees options on how they might spend their time and money while in Nashville that furthers causes related to social justice.

The value of professional development in inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and belonging is acutely needed by directors of college and university counseling centers. The AUCCCD conference assures that these topics are highlighted and part of the national dialogue on social justice issues. We look forward to your participation in the conference as we collectively advance solutions to higher education challenges.

In gratitude,

AUCCCD Board