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December 18, 2019

Dear SSR Members,

Many of you may have seen the comments made on Twitter and the concerns voiced by members regarding the location of our 2021 meeting site in St. Louis, Missouri. The SSR Board of Directors and the Executive Director Saima Hedrick have worked on developing ways to ensure that our meeting site locations uphold rights of all individuals. We also sought legal counsel as we explored our options.

The SSR Board of Directors approved St. Louis, Missouri, from the two vying cities, for our 2021 meeting site because its facilities could best accommodate the needs of our society. Notably, the issue at hand regarding the Missouri heartbeat bill that was passed by the state legislature and approved by the Governor has been blocked by a judge. We are therefore unsure how or when this issue will be resolved. Unfortunately, our contract prevents us from cancelling the meeting without penalty for any reason other than a 'force majeure,' like a hurricane.

It is a standard practice to plan conferences as many as two to three years in advance to ensure success in securing adequate space and as such the venues for 2020 (Ottawa), 2021 (St. Louis), and 2022 (Spokane) are confirmed. However, looking at 2023 and beyond, we are taking the following steps to ensure, as best we can, that our meetings are held in inclusive venues:

- 1) We are asking vendors to put a clause in our contracts that will allow SSR to terminate those contracts without liability in the event that any discriminatory law in the host state or city is passed prior to our meeting. Of course, changes in venue can only be responsibly made with sufficient lead time and without placing the sustainability of the society in jeopardy.
- 2) We will introduce changes to the SOP of the Future Meeting Committee and the Diversity Committee such that the two committees will discuss and mutually approve future meeting sites.
- 3) We will articulate the SSR's commitment to equality and inclusiveness on our website. While our By-Laws do not preclude us from making such statements, Article XVIII §3 does prohibit the Society from "carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation." This means that, as an organization, we cannot directly contact members of government – for example, the governor or state legislators in Missouri – and advocate for the enactment or repeal of a law. Section 3 of our By-Laws was included because the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations such as ours from attempting to influence legislation.

Going forward, we plan to implement clauses in our contracts that will ensure that SSR holds its meetings in sites with views on inclusion and equality consistent with our own. We will also update the future meeting sites SOP to ensure that these values are included as an evaluation criterion as each meeting site is considered. Our Executive Director, Saima Hedrick, and our Meeting Planner, Margaret Jamborsky, have also initiated regular tracking of state legislation to ensure the Society is aware of pending and potential issues that are important to our goals.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding as we devised a strategy to address member concerns. Please know that SSR shares your passion for equality and inclusion!

SSR Board of Directors