



To: The Ohio House of Representatives Committee on Economic Development, Commerce, & Labor

From: Colleen Dempsey, LISW, Practice Associate

Re: Testimony in opposition to HB 2

Chairman Young, Vice Chair DeVitis and Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, thank you for allowing me to voice opposition to House Bill 2 which would seriously limit employee recourse in cases of alleged employment discrimination. My name is Colleen Dempsey and I am the Practice Associate of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) - Ohio Chapter, the association that represents the profession of social work and our Code of Ethics.

First, I want to provide some background on the profession of social workers. Ohio boasts a strong social work workforce of nearly 27,000 licensed professionals and we interact with individuals and groups throughout the lifespan, in hospitals, schools, counseling offices, and social service agencies. Social workers are trained to understand the complexity of human systems and behavior. Across systems, social workers are intervening to reduce barriers standing in the way of a healthy, happy and productive life.

I am an independently licensed social worker in Ohio and in addition to my work with NASW, I also work in mental health and crisis services. Previously, I have worked as a case manager for families impacted by mental illness and with formerly incarcerated individuals diagnosed with a substance use disorder. I have seen first-hand the impact that employment can have in a person's life, and the impact of unemployment as well.

Employment serves as a primary vehicle for the distribution of income and opportunity. As such, we must protect and expand policies that aim to create equitable access to opportunity. We have abundant examples of discriminatory employment practices that have served as the impetus for Ohio and Federal civil rights law. Progress in anti-discrimination policy has brought us far, and NASW supports expansion of anti-discrimination efforts to cover sexual orientation, gender identity, reproductive health behavior, immigration status, and criminal history. With all the good work that could still be done in Ohio's discrimination policies, HB 2 will take Ohio in the wrong direction, weakening hard won protections based on race, gender, age, disability, veteran-status, and religion.

In Ohio, great weight is placed on employment as the mechanism for reducing poverty. In considerations of eligibility for social safety net programs, we have seen ever increasing focus on employment. NASW agrees in the importance of work. Meaningful employment and a living wage can improve someone's life more significantly and sustainably than reliance on social safety net programs. We must do everything in our collective power to reduce barriers to employment for Ohio's most marginalized groups, fortifying the ladder out of poverty.

Proponents of HB 2 have indicated the need for simplifying discrimination procedures and bringing Ohio policy in line with federal policy. We agree for the need to simplify the process but not for the trained human resource professionals. We must streamline the process and increase recourse opportunities for employees who do not have special training in recognizing and addressing discrimination – employees who may not know that recourse is possible.

Esteemed committee members, now is not the time to reduce protections for average people in Ohio. Our health and human service safety net is already strained in its capacity to support the un- and underemployed in Ohio. Now is the time to protect the working poor and marginalized peoples, so that we can survive and thrive as a state. I thank you for allowing me to voice our concerns about this legislation.

Thank you,

Colleen Dempsey

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