



Chairman Hoops, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and all members of the Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to comment on some provisions of HB 166 on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). OCA is the professional association representing licensed professional clinical counselors, licensed professional counselors, and school counselors throughout Ohio.

OCA is supportive of the changes made in House Bill 166 regarding the licensing of counselors. OCA has been working the Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board (CSWMFT) on these proposed changes. They were also considered as part of House Bill 523 in the previous General Assembly.

Currently, Ohio law requires that professional counselors obtain a CACREP degree from a clinical mental health counseling program, a clinical rehabilitation counseling program, or an addiction counseling program in order to qualify for licensure. CACREP is the national counselor program accrediting body. While well-intentioned, this language could inadvertently leave some qualified counselors ineligible for licensure.

The CSWMFT board has provided a public statement saying individuals not in clinical programs (school, rehabilitation, etc.) but who complete the clinical requirements are eligible for licensure. This amendment would clarify this interpretation in the language of the law, making this position more concrete, sustainable, and much less susceptible to frivolous change if the board decides in the future to modify their view of ORC Sections 4757.22 and 4757.23

Changing this language in statute will ensure qualified individuals can continue to become licensed, in turn maximizing the number of qualified licensed professional counselors available to serve Ohio citizens.

Another change proposed in the substitute bill would allow the CSWMFT Board to grant licensure by endorsement to certain out-of-state applicants. Ohio has long had one of the strongest licensure laws for counselors in the country. OCA is very proud of that fact. We believe strong licensure laws protect clients and provide a strong ethical professional identity for those practicing in our state. However, we also understand that applicants who have been practicing in other states should have path to licensure in Ohio if they meet and maintain Ohio's high qualifications and standards. OCA doesn't want qualified individuals denied licensure if they can demonstrate competency to uphold Ohio's strong standards.

Members of the committee, we thank you for hearing the perspective of the Ohio Counseling Association on provisions of HB 166. We hope you will favorably consider the provisions mentioned, which assist in protecting Ohioans and providing them greater access to mental health services.