

***Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board***

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House Community & Family Advancement

Wednesday, May 16

PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:

Brian Carnahan, Executive Director

Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board

IN SUPPORT OF:

House Bill 523 – Social Workers and Abuse Reporting

Chairman Ginter; Ranking member Boyd; Members of the Ohio House of Representatives Community and Family Advancement Committee:

I am Brian Carnahan, Executive Director of the Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board. I am here today to offer proponent testimony on behalf of House Bill 523. This legislation would expand mandated reporting for certain professionals, including persons licensed by the CSWMFT Board, which includes Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists. Licensees of this Board often provide services to clients in the client’s home. These licensees may be employed by public or private agencies, or may be in independent practice. Working in the home provides an opportunity to witness possible animal abuse. Licensees may also become aware of abuse through statements from clients during counseling and therapy sessions. Animal abuse is part of a cycle of violence that can exist within a home, and can also be an indicator of future issues for families and children. Under this legislation, animal abuse would be added to a list of mandated reporting requirements including child abuse and the neglect and abuse of adults. With the protections of this legislation in place, which includes immunity from civil or criminal penalties if a report of abuse is submitted in good faith, licensees of the Board would be able to make reports without being considered in violation of confidentiality restrictions in place to protect persons receiving services from CSWMFT licensees.

House Bill 523, in addition to mandating animal abuse reporting, also makes three important changes to Ohio Revised Code Chapter 4757 which defines the responsibilities of the Counselor, Social Worker, & Marriage and Family Therapist Board. First, the bill establishes a process for Counselor licensure endorsement that will enable the Board to license persons with a graduate degree comparable to the accredited graduate degree currently required by the Board provided the out of state licensee has five years of experience or more as a licensed counselor in another state. The Board regularly has to turn down applications from experienced counselors who wish to move to Ohio simply because their degree does not conform to the existing accreditation standard. In considering such applicants, the Board will ensure they have the education, training, and experience necessary to practice as a Counselor in Ohio. This modest change to how counselors from out of state may be licensed will help to enable these persons to continue in their chosen profession, but also help to close healthcare gaps, an issue of critical importance in addressing the opioid crisis. The Board and the Ohio Counseling Association have worked closely with Representative Lanese to create an endorsement process that protects the public through rigorous and fair standards while allowing certain qualified persons licensed in other states to practice in Ohio.

HB 523 also reduces the continuing education required for the renewal of a Social Work Assistant registration from thirty hours to fifteen hours. Social Work Assistants are registered professionals with an associate’s degree who assist Social Workers and other licensed professionals. These professionals provide important support in the delivery of services, however requiring thirty hours of continuing education is an unnecessary burden.

In addition to modifying the continuing education requirements for Social Work Assistants, the legislation allows the Board to elect to establish renewal dates for its license types based on criteria other than the issuance date. This additional authority will enable the Board to explore structuring renewals by license type, creating efficiencies in communication and renewal for both the Board and licensees.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony with the Committee. I welcome any questions the Members may have.