

November 29, 2022

The Ohio Senate
Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Re: HB 509, line 12858 regarding social work title protection

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Martin, and committee members,

As Executive Director of the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers I am here to express the association's strong opposition to the proposed changes to social work licensing in HB 509. We are asking you to oppose the proposed language listed on line 12858 as underlined here: "A baccalaureate degree in social work or another field acceptable to the board." We are grateful to Senator Antonio's office for working to draft an amendment to the bill to do so and we ask that you support her amendment.

The proposed additional language would end title and practice protection for social workers in Ohio. Currently, to have a license in social work you must have a degree in social work. The public could no longer trust that a "licensed social worker" is actually someone with a degree in social work, eroding our professional standing and reputation. Social work is the only profession listed in HB 509 that has these changes to who can become licensed, unfairly targeting social workers, and undermining our professionalism.

Social work is a specific profession with regulated standards for education, field practicums, and licensure. A degree from a related field likely carries no requirements for an internship meaning that an LSW could have no practical experience before becoming licensed. Furthermore, it devalues and disincentives earning a social work degree as a baccalaureate program requires 400 hours of field education and a master program requires 900 hours.

Title protection is a public protection issue. It is critical to note that the LSW in Ohio has a significant scope of practice with the ability to diagnose and assess mental health disorders under supervision. If the amendment and bill passes, Ohio faces a future where someone who has no training in mental health is able to diagnose under supervision which could result in serious harm to people experiencing mental health struggles.

There are no "related fields" that are social work; social work is social work. Ohio has repeatedly taken the position that title protection and practice protection are important. In 2012, the state removed the ability for people who earned related degrees before 1992 (degrees that consisted of social work



curriculum but with a different degree name) to become licensed. This proposed amendment would not only return our state to one without title protection, but it would take it a step further by not requiring any social work training for social work licensure, deeply harming the reputation of our profession.

The proposed change would remove Ohio from compliance with the ASWB exam, requiring Ohio to seek a waiver to allow non-social work degree holders to be able to take an exam. ASWB may not permit Ohio to have a waiver which would deny non-degreed social workers from becoming licensed. People with degrees in non-social work fields would be ineligible in most other states to become licensed as other states are maintaining title protection.

Further, we ask that you remove other proposed changes to the fee structure for LSWs in HB 509. The amendment would lower the renewal fee for LSWs from \$80 to \$60 and create a mechanism for LSWs to request a hardship exemption from paying initial licensure and renewal fees. While we appreciate the Ohio General Assembly's interest in addressing financial barriers in social work, we believe this is a misguided attempt as it would increase the workload for the licensing board at the same time as lowering their revenue. This would result in less availability of the board to provide customer service and increase already long wait times for licensure processing and other critical services. The report provided to the committee about costs cites that other states have lower fees but that is not uniformly the case (Kentucky's LSW renewal fee is \$75, West Virginia is \$100, Pennsylvania is \$95, Michigan is \$100, and Indiana is \$50.) The Ohio General Assembly should enact these policies to help social workers cover licensing costs but fund them through the general revenue fund rather than forcing social workers to work with an overburdened licensing board.

We appreciate your attention to this issue to protect social work in Ohio.



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