

December 6, 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 a current Master of Social Work student, I am expressing to you my strong opposition to the proposed changes to social work licensing in HB 509. I ask 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." I am incredibly grateful to Senator Antonio's office for working to draft an amendment to the bill to do so and request that you support her amendment.

The proposed additional language would terminate title and practice protection for social workers in Ohio. As of right now, to be a licensed social worker, you must have a degree in social work. The public could no longer trust that a "licensed social worker" is, in fact, someone with a degree in social work. This will erode both our professional standing and our reputation. Social work is the sole profession listed in HB 509 that contains these changes to who can become licensed, which is unfairly and inequitably targeting social workers and undermining our professionalism.

Social work is a specific and unique profession with regulated and accredited standards for education, field practicums, and licensure. A degree from a related field will not carry any accreditation requirements, and likely not carry requirements for an internship. This is of critical importance, as it means an individual could have no practical experience but still become licensed. It devalues and disincentives earning a social work degree as a baccalaureate program requires 4000 hours of field education and a masters program requires 900 hours. Furthermore, a degree from a related field will not contain training regarding social work theory, social work interventions, social work techniques, and ethical practice and code of conduct. Combined with field placement, all of these are critical to being a successful, competent social worker.

Title protection is a critical public protection issue. It is imperative to understand that the LSW in Ohio has a significant scope of practice, including the ability to assess and diagnose 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. This has a strong potential to result in serious harm coming to already vulnerable people experiencing mental health struggles. Broadening the eligible degrees for social work licensure will come at the expense and harm of the public.

There are no "related fields" that are social work - only social work is social work. Ohio has historically been of the position that title protection and practice protection are vital to the profession. In 2012, the state terminated the ability for people who earned related degrees

before 1992 to become licensed. This proposed amendment would both return our state to one without title protection and would take it a step further by not requiring any social work training for social work licensure, deeply harming the reputation of the social work profession.

Continuing on, you must understand that this proposed change would remove Ohio from compliance with the ASWB exam, which would result in the state of Ohio needing to seek a waiver allowing non-social work baccalaureate degree to be eligible for taking the exam. Realistically, ASWB may not allow for Ohio to hold this waiver, thereby denying any “related degree” holder ineligible for licensure.

Moreover, individuals with degrees that are not social work would never be permitted in most other states to become licensed as a social worker, as other states maintain their title protection. This is important to understand in light of the fact that Ohio is seeking to join the interstate compact. If this proposed bill passes as is, without the amendment proposed occurring, Ohio will likely not be eligible for nor invited to join the compact. Once other states are aware that Ohio has eliminated title and practice protection - and as social workers in Ohio, we will ensure other states will be made aware - they will no longer be able to trust that licensed social workers in Ohio are, in fact, actual social workers. This will eliminate the opportunity for Ohio to join the interstate compact. This will be a huge loss for the vision and future of Ohio.

I am incredibly concerned about the devastating, harmful, and unethical results that will occur if HB 509 passes as is, without the proposed amendment to line 12858. I ask that you take into account both my testimony and the hundreds of other testimony, and support the amendment to line 12858 to protect social work title protection and practice protection. Doing so serves to protect individuals living in Ohio from harmful practices that will occur if people untrained in social work, thereby lacking competency, are allowed to hold social work licensure. For the sake of the wellbeing of the general public, please support the amendment to HB 509.

I appreciate the attention you are giving to protect social work practice in Ohio.

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