

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 licensed social worker in Ohio, I am here to express my strong opposition to the proposed changes to the social work licensing in HB 509. I am 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." I am grateful to Senator Antonio's office for working to draft an amendment to the bill to do so and as 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 and rigorous educational background.

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's 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.

Speaking as a now- licensed social worker with over 2 years of experience in social work and holding a master's degree, I fear that non-related degrees do not hold the same rigor and practice experience as a social work degree. Speaking from experience, I received a baccalaureate degree in a non-social work but "related" field. I practiced as a mental health assistance per se for 2 years post-bachelor degree and felt I needed considerable more experience and education to continue even the assistant role I was in. this led me to seek out a master's degree in social work. Even practicing for 2 plus years, the diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders is extremely complex, which is why the supervision requirement and the practical experience during field practicum as a social work trainee is extremely valuable to be able to protect the patients and clients who are trusting in our professional title from harm.

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

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