

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 Licensing Social Worker (LSW) and practicing mental health therapist in Ohio, I would like to strongly encourage you to support an amendment to Substitute HB 509 that would remove the section that would allow people without degrees in social work to become licensed as social workers (LSW or LISW). This amendment would ensure the public would continue to receive social work services from those specifically educated in the critical competencies of social work. Additionally, without adoption of this amendment, Substitute HB 509 would negatively impact Ohio as it would likely bar our state from joining the interstate licensure compact that is currently in progress.

The bill's current language would end title and practice protection for social workers such as myself in Ohio. Currently, to have a license in social work you must have a degree in social work. In my personal experience, a social work degree and subsequent license is the product of many years of education, field work, and supervised practice. As it currently stands, social work is a distinct profession with specific standards for education, field work, and licensure. Those entering the field must complete between 400 (Bachelor's degree) and 900 (Master's degree) hours of supervised practicum experience before obtaining even a dependent license. Dependently licensed clinicians then must complete two additional years of supervised practice before being eligible to obtain an independent license. I have dedicated years to obtaining the education and experience necessary to practice as a social worker and am proud of the high level of awareness and understanding I have to professionally practice in the social work field as an LSW.

It is particularly important to note that the scope of practice for LSWs in Ohio includes the ability to diagnose and assess mental health disorders under supervision. If this bill passes without Senator Antonio's proposed amendment, 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.

All of these aforementioned components ensure that licensed social workers in Ohio are highly competent in our field. If the amendment is not added to Substitute Bill 509, the integrity of our profession is at risk. The public could no longer trust that a "licensed social worker" is actually someone with a degree in social work, negatively impacting our professional standing and reputation. In addition, obtaining this specialized education would be disincentivized, further eroding the quality of our service provision. Social work is the only profession listed in HB 509 that has these changes to who can become licensed, a distinction that unfairly targets social workers, and undermines our professionalism.

In addition, the interstate licensure compact provides an opportunity to bolster Ohio's workforce by allowing our resident social workers to continue living here while expanding their ability to provide services across the country via telehealth. As a state concerned with losing workforce to other cities and states, this compact is a critical step in retaining talent. The existing bill would also 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 have a precedent of maintaining title protection.

In conclusion, I urge you to support Senator Antonio's amendment to Substitute HB 509, removing the section that would allow people without degrees in social work to become licensed as social workers in Ohio. I greatly appreciate your attention to this issue to protect social work in Ohio and am happy to answer any questions via phone or email.



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