



SCHOOL OF BEHAVIORAL  
& NATURAL SCIENCES  
MOUNT ST. JOSEPH UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND  
SOCIAL WORK

5701 Delhi Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45233-1670  
513-244-3269  
Fax 513-244-4961  
www.msj.edu

December 1, 2022

RE: Opposing HB 509

To Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

Greetings, my name is Dr. Jennifer Withrow and I am the Chair of the Sociology & Social Work program, as well as Program Director and Assistant Professor of the Social Work program at Mount St. Joseph University, located in Cincinnati, Ohio. I would like to express the reasons why *I do not support HB 509*, express support for Senator Antonio's amendment to remove the section of the bill that allows related degrees to be licensed as a social worker, and provide additional options for increasing mental health service providers within the State of Ohio.

#### **Competency Based Profession – Pathway to Licensure**

As Director of the Social Work program, I can attest to the rigorous curriculum that social work students complete to ensure they meet professional competencies and standards upon graduation. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) sets these standards and competencies through their Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which all accredited social work programs must adhere to. It is these standards and competencies that set the social work profession apart from other academic disciplines and degrees.

To understand a competency-based approach to education and assessment, the CSWE 2022 EPAS handbook states:

A competency-based approach identifies and assesses what students demonstrate in practice. In social work, this approach involves assessing students' ability to demonstrate the competencies identified in the educational policy. Competency-based education rests on a shared view of the nature of competence in professional practice. Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to practice situations in a culturally responsive, purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being. The EPAS recognizes a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations. Overall professional competence is multidimensional and composed of interrelated competencies. An individual social worker's competence is seen as developmental and dynamic, evolving over time in relation to continuous learning and changes in the social environment and professional knowledge base.

Competency-based education is an outcome-oriented approach to curriculum design. The goal of the outcome-oriented approach is to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the integration and application of the competencies in practice. In the EPAS, social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies and component behaviors that consist of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes. Using a curriculum design that begins with the outcomes, expressed as the expected competencies, program developers produce the substantive content, pedagogical approaches, and educational activities that provide learning opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies. Assessment of student learning outcomes is an essential component of competency-based education. Assessment provides evidence that students have demonstrated the level of competence necessary to enter professional practice, which in turn shows that programs are successful in achieving their goals. Assessment information is used to improve the educational program and the methods used to assess student learning outcomes. Programs assess students' demonstration of competence. Programs use assessment methods to gather data that serve as evidence of student learning outcomes and the demonstration of competence.

In order to graduate with a social work degree, social work students must meet the outlined EPAS competencies. It is these high standards that separate social work majors from other majors, including psychology, criminology, and human services (and other related majors). It has been standard across the nation, that you cannot call yourself a ‘social worker’ if you do not have a social work degree. ***To keep the profession intact, recognizable, and held to the highest practicing standards, allowing non-social workers to become “Licensed Social Workers”, misrepresents the competencies, values, and ethics of the social work profession.*** In addition, this bill could prevent Ohioans from entering the interstate compact, making it impossible to transfer social work licensure from one state to the next.

***As such, I support Senator Antonio's amendment to remove the section of the bill that allows related degrees to be licensed as a social worker.***

### **Solutions to Increase a Mental Health Workforce**

The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers White Paper, titled “Breaking Point: Ohio’s Behavioral Health Workforce Crisis” provides solution options that I encourage the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee to consider, in lieu of dismantling the social work licensure in the State of Ohio. To increase the behavioral and mental health workforce, the Committee should consider:

1. Providing paid internships for majors entering the mental health fields. This will help recruit students into the mental health fields.
2. Providing scholarships/grants for majors entering the mental health fields. This will help recruit students into the mental health fields.
3. Providing incentives for adult learners (who have started a degree program many years ago, but did not complete) and are interested in completing their higher education degree and entering the mental health fields.

These solutions are just a few options the Committee should consider in lieu of dismantling the social work license in the State of Ohio. I know myself and other social work program directors would be happy to speak with you regarding ways we can recruit traditional and non-traditional students into the mental health fields.

Please reach out should you have any further questions, need clarifications, or would like to chat about the abilities of social work programs within the State of Ohio to increase the mental health workforce.

My best,



**Jennifer Withrow, Ed.D., MSW**

*Sociology & Social Work, Department Chair*

*Social Work, Director & Assistant Professor*

Mount St. Joseph University

5701 Delhi Road | Cincinnati, OH 45233-1672

513-244-3269 | [Jennifer.Withrow@msj.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Withrow@msj.edu)

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

### **Resources:**

Council on Social Work Education Accreditation: <https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/>

Council on Social Work Education EPAS: <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/94471c42-13b8-493b-9041-b30f48533d64/2022-EPAS.pdf>

The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers. 2021. Breaking Point: Ohio’s Behavioral Health Workforce Crisis. White paper.

[https://www.theohiocouncil.org/assets/WhitePaper/TheOhioCouncil\\_Whitepaper\\_BreakingPoint.pdf](https://www.theohiocouncil.org/assets/WhitePaper/TheOhioCouncil_Whitepaper_BreakingPoint.pdf)

National Association of Social Workers. Code of Ethics. <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics>