



Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and all members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 83. My name is Taylor Watson, and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). In the OCA, I am a Student Volunteer in the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities of Ohio (SAIGE). I am a new professional counselor in Cleveland, Ohio, and am incredibly active in my community. My clinical work focuses on LGBTQ mental health, making me qualified to speak on this topic today.

The OCA and SAIGE oppose SB 83 known as the "Enact Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act." This legislation undermines best practices and foundational tenets of the education and training of professional counselors. As mental health professionals, this legislation can lead to less effective behavioral health services for Ohioans.

Ohio SB 83 has the potential to interfere with the education and training of professional counselors, as outlined by the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics and Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards. Our ACA Code of Ethics requires that counselors respect the diversity of those we work with and seek training in areas where we are at risk of imposing our values onto clients (A.4.b. ACA Governing Council, 2014). Counselors are asked to maintain awareness and sensitivity regarding multicultural and diversity considerations (B.1.a. ACA Governing Council, 2014). Our profession acknowledges the importance of recognizing the effects of age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, language preferences, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (E.8. ACA Governing Council, 2014). SB 83 reinforces a false narrative that the education and discussion of these topics are divisive or a threat to higher education.

Counselor trainees and professional counselors must be trained to work with all Ohioans who seek treatment. The training of professional counselors in Ohio is rigorous and SB 83 introduces unneeded and ethically contraindicated government regulation into the education process. If enacted, SB 83 would jeopardize the quality of behavioral health services in Ohio. While we appreciate that the sponsor and members of the legislature have made modifications to the legislation to attempt to respond to feedback on the negative implications of the original proposal, we still need to be convinced this approach is in the best interest of Ohio higher education.

In conclusion, the Ohio Counseling Association, and SAIGE are opposed to Ohio SB 83. We are clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, counselor educators, and counselors-in-training. It is our collective professional belief that this legislation will harm the education of counselors, the treatment of our clients, and important multicultural discussions around our research. As mental health professionals, we urge you not to pass this bill to ensure that all Ohio counselors receive training and education aligned with ACA and CACREP best practices, without unneeded interference.

Written by OCA's Government Relations Committee and Mariah Payne, LPC, SAIGEO
Co-Liaison to the OCA Government Relations Committee

Edited by Emmett Drugan, LPC, SAIGEO Co-Liaison to the OCA Government Relations
Committee

References

ACA Governing Council (Ed.). (2014). ACA 2014 code of ethics.
<https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>