

**Opponent Testimony, SB 83  
House Higher Education Committee  
November 29, 2023**

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for your time and for providing the opportunity to hear our testimony.

My name is Liam Strausbaugh, I use he/they pronouns, and I am a licensed Ohio social worker and staff member with the Ohio chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW OH). I am testifying today to express NASW OH's opposition to SB 83 which would have a profound impact on social work education here in Ohio.

SB 83 would require that state institutions prohibit mandatory orientations or training courses regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, unless the course is required for accreditation. As social workers, the vast majority of our coursework mandated for graduation and accreditation falls under a DEI lens. This means that our social work professors and staff would need to seek special accommodations for nearly all of their courses simply in order to maintain a program of qualified helping professionals, which the state is in dire need of.

Social workers in nearly all aspects of society are short-staffed and under-funded, and this theme continues into higher education, where many of Ohio's social work programs have staff of only one or two. It is unreasonable to expect that these one to two individuals should be burdened with all curriculum planning, all teaching, all office hours and connections with students and potential students, all grading, and other administrative duties on their comparatively low salaries while also asking them to provide additional paperwork, seek permission, and obtain clearance just to continue teaching their accreditation-required courses.

SB 83 would also require state institutions to declare that they do not prohibit any speech, which opens the door for hate speech from anyone and against anyone to occur. If one student begins espousing hate speech to another; is the university to do nothing in the name of "free speech"? If someone does step in to do something about it, are they then able to be disciplined for "interfering with the intellectual diversity rights of another"?



NASW Ohio is also concerned with the language of SB 83 that states “all faculty, staff, and students will be treated as individuals, held to equal standards, and provided equality of opportunity with regard to race, ethnicity, religion, or sex”, but specifically removes references to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Similar language stating that “state institutions must prohibit all policies designed to explicitly segregate faculty, staff, or students based on race, ethnicity, religion, or sex in classroom settings, orientation ceremonies, and graduation ceremonies”, again specifically removes references to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression from these segregation protections. As social workers, we are held to ethical standards by the national branch of NASW as well as Laws and Rules created by the Ohio state licensing board. Both of these bodies prohibit social workers from discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity, but that is not the case in every profession. Why are we explicitly giving state institutions the go-ahead to discriminate against and segregate members of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly when 36 cities or counties in Ohio (mainly where these state institutions are found) have already passed local ordinances that ban LGBTQ discrimination?

Our students, our schools, and our state do not need the green-light for discrimination, do not need policies that conflict with their city ordinances, and do not need more paper-pushing simply to meet accreditation standards. Listen to what your students need instead.

We ask that you vote no on SB 83.

Thank you.

