

Testimony of Matthew Butler, MSSA, LISW-S, LICDC-CS  
Before the House Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
November 27, 2023

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Matthew Butler, and I am a Program Director and Lecturer for the Bachelor of Social Work at Kent State University, where I have taught for one year. Prior to this position, I taught at Case Western Reserve University (for seven years) and Youngstown State University (for two years). I do not represent Kent State University/Case Western Reserve University/Youngstown State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 83.

It is my considered opinion that Senate Bill 83 would have an immense adverse effect on the residents of the state of Ohio. Social work is considered an in-demand profession, with the number of positions within my field projected to increase dramatically over the next several years. As you all know, Ohio has struggled with multiple epidemics over the past decade. First, an opioid epidemic (which I have referred to as an opioid apocalypse), and second a suicide epidemic, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impacts continue to reverberate within our state in a number of ways. Social workers are the ones who most often fill in the gaps in our systems, whether we're talking about the mental health, addiction, healthcare, or social services systems. Each of those systems has been strained to its limit for a very long time, and each of those systems is badly hurting for more new social workers to replace existing folks who are retiring, in addition to many new positions which sit un-filled, sometimes for a significant period of time.

The reason my new social work program was created is to try and fill those gaps. I am passionate about finding individuals in rural communities throughout the state, and especially Northeast Ohio, and giving them the skills, education and expertise they need to enter the workforce and start to help those communities ameliorate the impacts of our triple epidemic. Many of the provisions contained within Senate Bill 83, however, would make it extremely difficult for social work programs throughout the state to teach our students. This is not a matter of ideology, or a matter of squelching free inquiry. Social workers are dedicated to encouraging dialogue between students and other types of stakeholders, and it is perfectly fine for a social worker to have an either more-liberal or more-conservative viewpoint on any given issue, as long as that social worker is adhering to our Code of Ethics.

The central issue, though, is that the Council on Social Work Education requires that many specific elements be included throughout our curriculum and each individual course. In order to obtain (or maintain) accreditation, each program must adhere to these CSWE standards, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/standards/2022/> .

I'm not sure whether this point has been considered by your committee, but CSWE Competency 2 (Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice) and Competency 3 (Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice) are fundamental aspects of every social work education. If every social work program in the

state is required to comply with Senate Bill 83, it will be extremely difficult to maintain their national accreditation status and still comply with the CSWE competencies. This legislation would place an even greater strain on the helping professions in Ohio (this is an issue for more professions than only social work). Programs losing their accreditation status means fewer graduates who are able to get licensed and get good positions within the state, which further weakens the resources that are available to all of us in Ohio, especially within rural communities such as mine.

I would humbly ask your committee to consider the ramifications of this legislation, and please consider the difficulty of balancing the requirements of national accreditation bodies with this proposed legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please reach out to me at (440)319-9056 with any further questions.

Sincerely Yours,

Matthew Butler, MSSA, LISW-S, LICDC