

**Opponent Testimony, HB 8  
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee**

Chair Bird, Vice-Chair Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for your time and for providing the opportunity to hear our testimony.

My name is Danielle Smith, and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers – Ohio Chapter (NASW Ohio). I am testifying today to express NASW Ohio opposition to HB 8 which would have a profound impact on Ohio’s students as a whole, but particularly youth of gender and sexual minorities.

HB 8 would mandate that any “sexually explicit content” or subjects be provided to parents prior to instruction but does not explicitly specify what subjects or content this includes. Due to this vague language and broad definition, there is potential that students would be unable to learn about important topics such as sexual health, gender identity and sexual orientation, or diverse family systems, should a student’s parent disagree with the content. Ohio already has laws in place (ORC Section 3313.212) that allow parents to examine instructional material via parental review boards, making this section of HB 8 redundant and unnecessary.

HB 8 would mandate that parents are to be notified of any changes to a student’s services related to mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. The Code of Ethics followed by social workers highlights the need for client confidentiality in services as well as respecting client autonomy and self-determination and the therapeutic relationship. Should school social workers be obligated to share any changes to a student’s mental and emotional support services, we could risk disrupting the therapeutic process and interrupting clinical progress by circumventing our client’s right and desires to privacy. If the student is sharing sensitive information such as a change in gender identity or discussing sexual desires, particularly with those of the same sex, it can be a great danger to a student if we become mandated by law to share that information with a parent when the student is not ready for that information to be shared. HB 8 does provide exemptions to this if there is reason to believe that the student would experience abuse, neglect, or abandonment, if that belief is not based on religious or political belief but provides no context as to how this belief should be substantiated or enforced.

Schools in Ohio are already short-staffed, particularly regarding school social workers. The recommended ratio of school social workers to students is 1:250, but as of a 2021 study by Mental Health America, Ohio is currently averaging 1 social worker to 4,854 students<sup>1</sup>. These numbers are already unacceptable and requiring more tasks as well as ethical boundary violations for school social workers will only further diminish this already insufficient workforce.

NASW Ohio urges you to table consideration of HB 8.  
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<sup>1</sup> <https://hopefulfutures.us/action-ohio/>

