

I ask you consider the depth of knowledge and experience behind these words, and I urge you to vote against HB 8. As school personnel, any social workers working in a school would be obligated to follow this new law. Thus, any school social workers would be forced to immediately share any student's request to identify as a gender that does not align with the student's biological sex. As a result, school social workers could possibly be force to "out" students to their parents when they may not feel safe or ready to do so. There are no exceptions in this law for if this could cause direct harm to a student's physical or emotional safety at home. This greatly undermines the student's right to confidentiality, can be incredibly harmful to the therapeutic relationship, and can cause a social worker to violate ethical practice.

This bill would require a student's parent to be notified of any change in the student's services, including counseling services, or monitoring related to the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being or the school's ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for the student. It would also prohibit school district personnel (including social workers) from discouraging or prohibiting parental notification of and involvement in critical decisions affecting a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. While Ohio law states that parents do have right to access their child's medical and mental health records, it is often best practice to set boundaries in the beginning of mental health services with parents to encourage them not to request access to their child's mental health therapy notes, as it can cause feelings of distrust between parent and child hinder clinical progress. This bill may prohibit social workers from setting that boundary with parents.

The goal of a mental health provider is not to keep critical information from parents, and mental health providers are already required to report if a client is a risk to the safety of themselves or others. However, what is considered "any changes" "to the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being" could be interpreted in vastly different ways, opening social workers to liability. It is critical that mental health providers can use their clinical judgement, best practices standards, and ethical guidelines to make decisions regarding disclosure and confidentiality when working with minors and families. Additional superfluous notification requirements also over burden already overly taxed mental health providers.

In solidarity,

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