

Opponent Testimony, HB 8  
Senate Education Committee

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and Senate Education Committee members thank you for your time and for providing the opportunity to hear this testimony.

My name is Bailey Fullwiler, and I am a licensed social worker who has been serving Ohioans for the past 9 years. I am testifying to express my opposition to HB 8 which would have a significant impact on all Ohio's students, particularly youth of gender and sexual minorities. HB 8 would mandate that any "sexually explicit content" or subjects be provided to parents before instruction but does not explicitly specify what subjects or content this includes. Due to this vague language and broad definition, there are clear barriers to implementation along with the potential risk that students would be unable to learn about topics vital to their well-being and public health such as sexual health, gender identity, sexual orientation, or diverse family systems, should a student's parent disagree with the content. Ohio presently has legislation in place (ORC Section 3313.212) that allows parents to examine instructional material via parental review boards, making this section of HB 8 redundant and unnecessary. During my internship with the Richland County Youth and Family Council, many of my adolescent clients were navigating the results of insufficient and inconsistent sexual education. Several of those clients had reduced social support as a result of familial and intimate partner conflict that came as a result of insufficient and inconsistent sexual education and the expected outcomes (unplanned pregnancy, miscarriages, and infectious diseases). In addition, several clients were navigating health outcomes of sexually transmitted infections that could have been avoided with proper education and resources for youth which HB 8 as it's written puts at risk.

HB 8 would additionally mandate that parents be notified of any changes to a student's services related to mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. The Social Work Code of Ethics highlights the need for client confidentiality in services, as well as, respecting client autonomy and self-determination and the therapeutic relationship. The Code of Ethics is not only a country-wide set of ethical expectations for social workers but is also guided by evidence-based practice meaning what is demonstrated in research to be most effective in serving our communities. Should school social workers be legally obligated to share any changes to a student's mental and emotional support services, we jeopardize the therapeutic process and interrupt clinical progress by circumventing our client's right and desire for 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. I learned both through my service at the Ohio Reformatory for Women and the Richland County Youth and Family Council that not all children are safe to be themselves at home, and the risk of harm to children who are sexual minorities is inequitably high. To learn more about the overrepresentation of youth in our severely underfunded foster

care system visit [youth.gov](https://youth.gov). HB 8 as it's written has a high-risk potential to harm more LGBTQIA+ youth by legally mandating social workers share confidential information about their sexual identity with guardians who may not be safe or accepting experiencing their likelihood of abuse, neglect, and foster care placement.

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. These high caseloads demonstrate that students are already not receiving the care they need and that school social workers are presently over capacity. Legislation like HB 8 that would require more tasks, as well as, ethical boundary violations for school social workers will only further diminish this already insufficient workforce and risk moral distress and high attrition of those in the field presently. I strongly encourage you as my elected officials to veto HB 8.

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