

Hello Senator Brenner and the Senate Education Committee.

My name is Dee Ratna and I am a queer, Muslim, immigrant, POC and most importantly, someone who has experienced and benefited from social workers support in school settings. The student-social worker confidentiality agreement provided me a safe space and I am emailing to express my opposition to HB 8 and to urge you not to pass the bill, or at the very least to make essential amendments to the bill. While there are many important concerns about this bill, there are two main ways that HB 8 would harm school social work practice, and our student clients. Included in the attachment is my testimony form slip.

First, HB 8 would require all school staff, including social workers, to forcibly out transgender and gender diverse youth to their parents, regardless of if the student is ready or safe to be out to their families. This requirement denies transgender and gender diverse youth essential support, ties the hands of school mental health professionals, and is in violation of new Title IX regulations. Also, in some cases, outing a student to their parents may result in abuse or neglect. At the very least I implore you to amend the bill to add an exception to this reporting requirement for rare cases in which outing a student is likely to result in abuse or neglect of the student.

Secondly, the bill creates excessive reporting requirements around students' "mental, emotional, or physical well-being" by defining what is included in broad and unclear terms that could open social workers up to liability and increase already excessive workloads. There are minor changes that could be made to clarify these reporting requirements to avoid confusion and minute-by-minute reporting requirements of normal everyday changes.

Social workers and other mental health professionals are trained to honor client confidentiality, creating a safe, supportive environment for clients to discuss their feelings and find safe ways to have these discussions with other people in their lives, including parents. HB 8's reporting requirements for professionals will create an environment where students have no sense of confidentiality and will lead to students feeling unable to share critical information with professionals, such as feelings of anxiety, depression, suicidality, or bullying. Students deserve a safe space free of judgement to be able to express their feelings and HB 8 threatens to take that away.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 8 or to at least consider amendment language suggested by The National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Chapter and Ohio Counselors Association which would help to rectify some of the dire issues created by HB 8. NASW Ohio can be reached at 614-461-4484 for more questions.

Thank you for your support,
Dee Ratna

