

Opponent Testimony, HB 8, Written-Only

Senate Education Committee

December 9, 2024

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

My name is Ashley Dudinsky (she/her). I am a social work instructor in Ohio and also serve as the Region 3 (Cleveland area) Director on the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Ohio Chapter Board and am a member of the Social Work Criminalization Task Force, Legislative Advocacy Committee and the Political Action for Candidate Election representative for Region 4 (Youngstown area). In all these roles, I provide education and support for the social workers in Northeast Ohio. **I am testifying today to express my opposition to HB 8 which would have a critical impact on Ohio's students and violate the social work Code of Ethics.**

Although I oppose the bill in its entirety, I am most concerned with the impact the bill will have on youth autonomy and safety. The student's safety should be of top priority; however, having this bill in place could create and endanger the student through the impact and lack of control leading to unsafe learning and living environments. HB 8 would intentionally put the student at possible risk by outing the student to their families without knowing what the home environment consists of, including the possibility for abuse or violence. HB 8 would also negatively impact the mental health profession and the long-standing safety and ethical care that we provide.

The Social Work Code of Ethics emphasizes client confidentiality and autonomy among other important factors to ensure the safety, respect, and well-being of the individuals that we work with<sup>1</sup>. Mental health professionals, including social workers, are expected to uphold these high ethical standards which already includes a mandate to report if a client is a serious risk to themselves or others. HB 8 would mandate the parents of the youth to be notified of any change to mental, emotional, or physical health services or if a student identifies as a gender that does not align with their sex at birth. No matter how an individual identifies, they are still a human-being that is not experiencing a mental health change, it is the person coming forth as they authentically are. The therapeutic relationship would also be compromised, and the safety of

confidentiality diminished. The new regulations would require that the individual be denied the ability to share their authentic self in the way they choose.

As mental health providers, our role is to ensure the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual safety of individuals, to ensure social justice for all humans, and to assure that all individuals have their dignity and worth protected. It would put the safety of students at risk, violate their privacy, take away their autonomy, and increase their risk for child abuse, homelessness, and suicide<sup>2</sup>. I urge you to vote no on HB 8 to help protect our youth and the role of mental health professionals whose primary focus is to help all human beings.

Thank you,

Ashley L. Dudinsky MSSA, AND, LSW  
(she/her)

<sup>2</sup>Prince, D. M., Ray-Novak, M., Tossone, K., Peterson, E., Gillani, B., & Mintz, L. (2024). Psychological comorbidities and suicidality in sexual and gender minority foster youth. Children and Youth Services Review.