

April 19, 2023

Subject: Opposition testimony to SB83

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Rulli, and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

The National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter (NASW Ohio) strongly opposes Ohio Senate Bill 83, the Higher Education Enhancement Act, as it would have notable ramifications on social work education and accreditation, and thus the behavioral health workforce in Ohio.

Social workers are highly educated, licensed professionals working in a vast array of practice areas including mental health, addiction treatment, aging, child welfare, healthcare, schools, and more. Despite the diversity of our profession, we are united by our shared theories of practice, values, Code of Ethics, and education. Our professional Code of Ethics states that “the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.”¹ Social workers practice directly with some of our society’s most vulnerable populations, and thus to ensure ethical and competent practice, social workers have high educational and ethical standards.

In order for a social worker to become licensed they must graduate with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), or a Master of Social Work (MSW) from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), depending on licensure level. CSWE is the national accreditation body responsible for establishing the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) for the 800-plus accredited programs in the U.S. and its territories.² Requiring programs to achieve and maintain competency in the areas of diversity, privilege, oppression, and intersectionality has been central to social work accreditation standards since 1952. A fundamental aspect of this foundational knowledge is to teach about historical institutionalization of privilege and

¹ National Association of Social Workers. (2021). *Preamble to the code of ethics*.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

² Council on Social Work Education. (2021, February 18). *Social Work Competencies Regarding Diversity and Social Justice*. <https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/CSWECompass/Statement-on-Diversity-and-Social-Justice-EPAS-021821.pdf>



oppression that has permeated our systems and social fabric. In the current iteration of the CSWE EPAS, accredited social work programs are required to teach about racism and social justice based on two (of nine) social work competencies. Each competency is carefully and intentionally worded to ensure that programs have clear guidance on developing activities, lessons, and courses that align with social work values accreditation needs.² Competency 2, titled “Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice” and Competency 3, titled, “Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice” are designed to prepare social workers to engage effectively with clients of all backgrounds, belief systems, and identities as we work to enhance human well-being through individual and systems interventions.

Senate Bill 83 would ban diversity, equity, and inclusion course content that is required for social work accreditation and hinder schools of social work’s ability to ensure that faculty adhere to accreditation standards and the profession’s Code of Ethics. Despite claims that SB 83 would “ensure free expression on campus and in the classroom at Ohio’s public universities and colleges,”³ SB 83 would in fact potentially cause an entire profession to become inaccessible to Ohio students. Limiting individuals’ ability to pursue the profession of their choice, because the educational standards of that profession do not align with members of this legislature’s beliefs is in-fact censorship. No one is forced to pursue a social work education, but those who choose to, should be able to do so without hinderance from the government.

The repercussions of this bill on social work education will extend far beyond the impact to Ohio social work students, programs, faculty, and staff, it will also impact the wellbeing of Ohioans more broadly. I’m sure you are aware that Ohio is amid a behavioral health workforce crisis. Between 2013-2019, even before the COVID-19 pandemic began-- which severely exacerbated these issues-- the demand for behavioral health services increased 353% between 2013-2019 while the available workforce only increased by 174%.⁴ While the professions that make up the behavioral health workforce are broad, in Ohio, social workers provide 28% of all behavioral health services.⁵ To adequately address the behavioral health needs of all Ohioans,

³ Cirino, Jerry C. (2023, April 4). *Ignore 'hysteria.' Freedoms attack on Ohio campuses. My bill will protect them.* The Columbus Dispatch. <https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2023/04/04/first-amendment-assaulted-in-academia-ohio-senate-bill-83-will-fix-that-colleges-academic-freedom/70077657007/>

⁴ The Ohio Council. (2021). *Breaking point: Ohio’s behavioral health workforce crisis.* https://www.theohiocouncil.org/assets/BreakingPoint/TheOhioCouncil_Whitepaper_BreakingPoint.pdf

⁵ Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. (April 2021). *Understanding supply and demand within Ohio’s behavioral health system: Analysis of behavioral health demand across the state of Ohio.*



strong investment into the behavioral health workforce is critically needed. SB 83 would do the opposite by threatening the ability for Ohio to license new social workers who are desperately needed. With even fewer social workers to meet the needs of our community members, Ohio will see more suicide, addiction, family violence, and incarceration. Unmet behavioral health needs have dire outcome for Ohio families, communities, and even our economy.

We urge this committee to vote no on this bill and focus your efforts on increasing the accessibility of higher education instead. Increasing accessibility to higher education will guarantee robust conversations with political and cultural diversity in the classroom.

Thank you for your time. If you have any additional questions for NASW Ohio, I would be happy to discuss this with the committee further.

Hannah Ware, LSW
Development Associate
NASW Ohio Chapter
614-461-4484
hware.naswoh@socialworkers.org

https://data.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/8be25a08-6cbd-414f-a6eb-0f5bfd6ff1a2/MHAS+Reports.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_K9I401S01_H7F40QBNU3SO1F56-8be25a08-6cbd-414f-a6eb-0f5bfd6ff1a2-od.vdj4

