



Counseling & Testing Center

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April 18, 2023

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to provide witness testimony as an opponent to Senate Bill 83, and as a licensed psychologist involved in the training of future clinicians, an interested party. Mental health care and prevention of mental illness is a critical initiative in the State of Ohio, and has been the center of many initiatives from Governor DeWine's office. As of January 2023, Governor DeWine has signed more than \$175 million in mental health expenses into law (<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/01/10/huge-mental-health-investment-coming-to-ohio/>). Senate Bill 83 may not be intended as a direct attack on those and other attempts to address the mental health and substance abuse crises in Ohio, but passing it into law would prevent the education of any mental health care providers in the state. Accreditation requirements for training programs, including American Psychological Association (for psychology graduate programs), CACREP (for clinical mental health counseling and counselor education programs), and the Counsel on Social Work Education (for graduate social work programs) require trainees are educated in cultural diversity, among many other important areas of training. Further, the experiential part of education in these professions requires inclusion of topics that would be deemed illegal by SB 83. The State of Ohio also requires continuing education for licensed psychologists which includes cultural competence training, which would effectively force all licensed psychologists in Ohio to either not meet criteria to maintain licenses that are necessary to practice in this state, or to risk legal action against us for violating this overly restrictive law that is inconsistent with other laws in this state.

As an APA accredited internship program, The University of Akron's Counseling & Testing Center (along with all other accredited internships sites in the state) would be forced to discontinue training – which would prevent completion of degree programs for anyone choosing to work in Ohio. It would also detrimentally impact service provision to clients in any accredited sites, as we would be unable to continue employment of trainees, who typically serve great numbers of clients at a significantly reduced cost for employment.

In addition to the severe consequences of enacting this law, there is serious misunderstanding of what is meant by diversity education if SB 83 is seen as an improvement to intellectual freedom, or a protection for individuals who may feel uncomfortable with the content. Diversity education is a broad umbrella that covers not only the grossly misinterpreted "critical race theory" that the bill is apparently attempting to prevent. It also includes any understanding or exploration of those with varying education, vocation, disability/ability status, geographical diversity (e.g. rural individuals), social class, religion, or even heterosexual cisgender experiences. Just last week, I provided training to our interns on Appalachian culture, and area of study and practice with which I have expertise. The training is almost entirely about

white, working class, Christian experiences and how understanding this unique subculture that exists in Ohio essential to effective and respectful clinical practice. Under SB 83, I would no longer be permitted to mention this group or *any* identities in our training program.

Please reconsider SB 83 as it will do more harm to our citizens than any good its proponents can claim. I hope that my colleagues will have an opportunity to share their perspectives as well, but I can assure you that they stand in opposition to this dangerous proposition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Sara Rieder Bennett, Ph.D.".

Sara Rieder Bennett, Ph.D.

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