

Testimony in Opposition of SB 83
Delivered to the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Jodi Whitted—Assistant Professor of Social Work at University of Cincinnati
April 17, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Minority Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition of Senate Bill 83. My name is Jodi Whitted, and I am an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio. I have worked in higher education for the last nine years. Prior to my full-time career in academia, I worked with vulnerable and diverse people in the community through my work as a clinical social worker in both mental health and medical settings. Additionally, it should be noted that social workers are employed by both private and public sectors working with people across settings and the lifespan.

I am writing in opposition of SB 83, the Enact Higher Education Enhancement Act. The signing of this bill into law would not only impact me as an academic, but also impact the education that I provide to future social workers, enabling them to work effectively with clients of varying backgrounds from their own. SB 83 seeks to prohibit the teaching of “specified concepts” such as diversity, social justice, systemic racism, gender identity, equity, or inclusion. As humans, we know that we all are raised in different environments and by families from different cultures. The National Institute of Health¹ recognizes these social and cultural factors as direct determinants of wellbeing. So, without the ability to teach students about Human Diversity in the Social Environment, they will be ineptly prepared to impactfully work with ALL Ohioans.

Not only is the ability to teach our students about human diversity in the best interest of our student and clients, but it is also mandated by our accrediting body. As social work educators, the Council on Social Education provides specific Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards² that must be followed to maintain accreditation in higher education. These accreditation standards include the following: Advance Human Rights, Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice and Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Practice. Without the ability to meet accreditation standards, social work programs in the state of Ohio will be at risk. This is of utmost concern as Governor DeWine has prioritized increasing the mental health work force³ and currently, social workers account for most mental health providers in the state of Ohio. Without social workers to help meet the need, it will be difficult for the Governor to meet his identified goals.

In addition to my concerns related to being able to prepare my students to meet the unique needs of Ohioans across the state, I hope that you will reconsider SB 83 because diversity is beautiful and should be celebrated, not prohibited. Regulating the ability to teach about different cultures, races, and identities is not a decision best made by the government.

Thank you for your time.

Jodi Whitted, MSSW
Assistant Professor
University of Cincinnati
812-606-8436
whittejs@ucmail.com

¹ See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK19924/>

² <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/94471c42-13b8-493b-9041-b30f48533d64/2022-EPAS.pdf>

³ <https://governor.ohio.gov/media/news-and-media/governor-dewine-announces-proposal-for-85m-investment-to-grow-ohio-behavioral-healthcare-workforce-05132022>