

May 17, 2023

Subject: Opposition testimony to SB83

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

My name is Hannah Ware, I am a licensed social worker, and staff member of the National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter (NASW Ohio). I first want to thank the committee for creating, in the updated sub bill, exemptions for mandatory DEI content that is required for accreditation and licensure standard. This provision is essential for the accreditation of social work programs and thus our behavioral health workforce. However, while this is a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough to rectify the harm that this bill will have on Ohio's institutions of higher education, social work educators, and our workforce. Thus, NASW Ohio continues to strongly oppose Senate Bill 83.

Social workers practice directly with clients of all backgrounds, belief systems, and identities as we work to enhance human well-being through individual and systems interventions. Thus, in order to ensure ethical and competent practice with Ohio's diverse population, social work education is designed to prepare social workers with a deep understanding of cultural diversity, the impacts of marginalization and systemic inequality on communities and individuals, and strategies designed to eliminate societal barriers and ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably¹. Such educational standards are required for program accreditation by the national accreditation body, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). However, the CSWE is far from the only national accreditation body that has diversity, equity, and inclusion principles embedded in their accreditation standards. Accreditation bodies for

¹ Council on Social Work Education. (2021, February 18). *Social Work Competencies Regarding Diversity and Social Justice*. Retrieved on April 16, 2023, from <https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/CSWECompass/Statement-on-Diversity-and-Social-Justice-EPAS-021821.pdf>



nursing, dentistry, education, veterinary medicine, psychology, and many more also require DEI standards for accreditation.²³⁴

Despite the exemptions outlined in the new sub bill, SB83 would place excessive burdens on social work program faculty and administrators by requiring them to seek exemptions for each and every required course that includes diversity, equity, and inclusion content and resubmitting any time a change is made to an exempted course. The exemption process outlined in this bill is incredibly onerous and the administrative burden that it will place on the many programs that require DEI content for accreditation will be costly. Additionally, we ask what thought has been given to how the office of the chancellor of higher education could possibly have the capacity to review, in a timely manner, course exemptions from Ohio's 14 four-year public universities with 24 branch campuses, 23 two-year community and technical colleges and more than 50 four-year private colleges and universities⁵, in addition to the rest of the numerous new regulatory requirements introduced by this bill.

Additionally, many accreditation bodies not only require DEI course content, but also require policies and practices to intentionally recruit and retain a diverse candidate pool, faculty, and administrative staff. Efforts which would also be hindered by this bill, and thus could also result in loss of accreditation.

In sponsor testimony of SB 83, it was stated that Title VI and Title IX "Should suffice to protect individuals who need protection" and that "Massive and costly infrastructure [referring to DEI initiatives] on top of the Title VI and Title IX offices" shouldn't be needed to accomplish that.⁶ Yet, this bill does exactly what is claimed is unnecessary by creating massive and costly infrastructure to be administered through the Department of Higher Education. However, this bill goes much further in controlling what can be said and done on campuses and, unlike DEI

² Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2022). *2022 CAEP Standards*. Retrieved on May 15, 2023, from <https://caepnet.org/standards/2022-itep/introduction>

³ Bohanon, M. (2022, March 16). *DEI in Accreditation*. Retrieved May 15, 2023, from <https://www.insightintodiversity.com/dei-in-accreditation/>

⁴ American Psychological Association. (June 2015). *Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology*. Retrieved on May 15, 2023, from <https://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/about/policies/standards-of-accreditation.pdf>

⁵ Ohio Secretary of State. *Ohio Colleges and Universities*. Retrieved on May 15, 2023, from, <https://www.ohiosos.gov/profile-ohio/places/ohio-colleges-and-universities/>

⁶ Cirino, Senator Jerry c. (March 22, 2023). SB 83 Sponsor Testimony. Retrieved on May 15, 2023, from <file:///C:/Users/hware/Downloads/SB83SponsorTestimony.pdf>



initiatives, these regulations are punitive, mandatory across the board, and target specific programs.

It is clear from the historic showing of opposition at the SB 83 hearing on April 19th, that Ohioans have not asked for even more regulation by the government and do not believe that the “Higher Education Enhancement Act” will in fact enhance the quality of education in Ohio. This bill will degrade social work education, and many other programs, by burying administrators and faculty in red tape. The excessive regulations in this bill will make Ohio universities less attractive to both faculty, administrators, and students and worsen Ohio’s ‘brain drain’ and current workforce issues, especially in behavioral health, medical professions, and teaching.

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 support robust conversations with political and cultural diversity in the classroom as well as Ohio’s workforce.

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.

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