

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and honorable members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Kaitlyn Stephens. I am a resident of Springboro, Ohio, and I am a student attending college at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. I will be graduating this May with my Bachelor's degree in Social Work, with a minor in Disability Studies. I am writing to express my strong opposition for SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

As I am about to graduate with my degree in social work in May, and as I envision my career ahead of me, I have been reflecting on the education I have received over the past four years. The diploma I will receive in May indicates that Miami University has prepared me to the best of their ability for what I will encounter as a social worker. My education has involved many critical discussions about our social work code of ethics, and how it is our professional duty and responsibility to follow this code in all of our work. The code of ethics states it is our duty to act in service of others, challenge social injustice, remain competent and trustworthy in our profession, and above all, we must always respect the inherent dignity and worth of every person we encounter.

How would I be prepared to work with people of all identities and backgrounds if I was not able to learn about their unique perspectives? If all identities and experiences were not represented in my education, how would I know that I am upholding the social work code of ethics to the fullest extent?

As someone who is extremely passionate about doing everything I can to help and support others around me, I would never change the education I received because it has allowed me to better understand my neighbors and the hardships they experience in their lives. I would not wish for this education to change for the social workers that will come after me.

Senate Bill 1 is dangerous and challenges the existence of my profession. This proposed bill would make it impossible to obtain a social work license in the state of Ohio if our higher education social work programs are not able to teach to the standards set by the Council on Social Work Education, which includes teaching about topics of diversity, privilege, oppression, and intersectionality. The state of Ohio is already facing significant shortages of social workers, resulting in a mental health crisis with detrimental impacts for hardworking Ohioans. This bill would result in students leaving Ohio to pursue their social work education, further contributing to the worker shortages and current mental health crisis.

I believe it is vitally important that educational institutions retain the ability to challenge our preconceived notions about our surroundings, and challenge us to be radically kind in how we interact with each other, no matter the identities we hold close.

I ask you to please consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Kaitlyn Stephens