

Written-Only Opponent Testimony for SB 1

House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

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Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the chance to share written testimony. My name is Soilé Talmadge (she/her) and I am a second year Masters of Social Work Candidate at the Jack and Joseph Mandel School at Case Western Reserve University. As a proud student in the field of social work, I wish to voice my strong opposition to SB 1.

I cannot begin to fully express my gratitude for the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs on campus. These programs expose us students to walks of life that are vastly different from their own, and teach us to treat all people with dignity and respect. As social workers, we have a duty to enhance the wellbeing and meet the basic needs of ALL people with particular attention to those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. Within the classroom, particular attention to diversity, equity and inclusion has helped me to better understand the needs of my peers and community members with physical and mental disabilities and to be able to treat them with the respect they deserve.

Already, the reduction of DEI programming and curriculum in institutions across the state has had devastating impacts on our ability to treat all people with respect and dignity. My peers and I are unable to reach clientele who are underrepresented and in the most need of services. We have seen how communities suffer when the marginalized are pushed further away- how our clients lose their ability to meaningfully contribute to the economic, social, and intellectual development of their communities. We fear for the futures of our clients, who represent a wide spectrum of abilities, socio-economic statuses, races and ethnicities, and geographic regions.

We fear for the future of our curriculum and job security. If DEI is eliminated from Ohio schools of social work, these programs will lose accreditation from The Council on Social Work Education, and students will be forced to receive their education outside of Ohio. Social workers will be unable to receive licensure in Ohio. Not only will we lose licensure, but the implementation of SB 1 will lead to diminished academic standards and an inability to adhere to the National Association of Social Workers code of ethics, such as practicing cultural competence and social justice. Students will be less prepared to deliver sound mental health services for all Ohioans.

We fear that suppression of students and faculty discussion of “controversial beliefs” in the name of “intellectual diversity” will actually make students more closed minded and rigid in their thinking. When students can express racist, sexist, ableist, or homo/transphobic opinions without

being challenged, it creates an extremely unsafe environment for all students. This bill will not create classrooms where students openly express and challenge their own political and ideological beliefs, but will create a culture of fear that prevents faculty from engaging in enlightening conversations.

Passing SB 1 will have tremendous catastrophic implications not only for social work students but for the vast Ohioans that we serve. Although my university will not be directly impacted by these decisions, it will set a precedent for Ohio universities to neglect such essential and core teachings that make students more competent in their practices and more accepting of all people. Given the ripple effect that this bill will inevitably have on all Ohioans, I urge you to vote “NO” on SB 1. Instead of suppressing rigorous and necessary academic discussions on DEI topics that should not be deemed controversial, I urge you to provide more funding for mental health services and encourage the growth of behavioral health professionals in Ohio. At the very least, I ask that you amend the bill to exclude higher education programs whose accreditation will be negatively impacted.

I appreciate your time and consideration of my concerns, Thank You.