

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

My name is Brittany Montgomery. I am a licensed social worker living in Marion, and I serve clients all over the state but primarily in Central Ohio. I am writing to oppose companion bills SB 1 & HB 6. The bills' banning of "controversial topics" including that related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in coursework will hurt the standing of Ohio's higher education institutions and, more importantly, students and the community at large who these students impact when they enter their careers. These bans on put entire programs at risk, including social work.

As a social worker, I am especially concerned about its impact on social work programs' ability to maintain accreditation. Social work program accreditation by CSWE requires content in diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure that social workers can practice effectively with clients of all backgrounds, belief systems, and identities. I am deeply concerned that the passage of this legislation would result in social work programs losing accreditation and thus not allowing social work students to become licensed to offer critical services in Ohio. Students would seek their education out of state, which often results in those students moving out of state long-term, especially if they cannot get licensed to practice in Ohio.

Social workers meet critical needs, often the most basic of needs that are fundamental to health and well-being, of every population and demographic. From data.ohio.gov, in 2019, 31% of mental health and addiction counselors in Ohio were social workers, the largest portion of licensed mental health professionals. I currently work part-time in healthcare in the primary care setting with an overall goal of preventing hospitalizations. I also work part-time for an adoption agency, placing children in safe, stable homes. I have worked in a NICU with the smallest, most fragile babies to exist. I have also done healthcare discharge planning in one of the largest Central Ohio hospitals, getting patients discharged as quickly as possible but with the services and care they need to prevent another hospitalization. Social workers are critical to the health and well-being of our society and we cannot stand to lose our students and, therefore, our workforce to other states.

I urge you to oppose SB 1 (and HB 6). This legislation harms students, faculty, and the integrity of higher education and puts the social work workforce at risk. Please stand for academic freedom and vote NO.

Sincerely,
Brittany Montgomery, MSW, LSW