

Written-Only Opponent Testimony for SB 1  
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

My name is Ashley Dudinsky (she/her), and I serve as the Region 3 (Cleveland area) Co-Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Ohio Chapter Board. I am also an active member of the NASW Ohio Social Work Criminalization Task Force, the Legislative Advocacy Committee, and the Political Action for Candidate Election Committee. However, the role I cherish most is the honor of teaching social work courses in higher education for the past five years and I am writing to express my **strong opposition to SB 1**.

Ohio Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) introduces a series of monstrous changes that will significantly impact higher education, particularly students entering the social work profession and the individuals in the community they are meant to serve. One of the bill's key provisions is the restriction on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and content. By limiting DEI initiatives, SB 1 directly undermines the ability of social work programs to prepare students for working with diverse and marginalized populations. Social work is rooted in core ethical principles, including competence, justice, dignity and worth of the person, and the importance of human relationships [1]. Each of these requires an understanding of systemic inequalities and the ability to challenge oppressive structures. Without these fundamental components, social work professionals will be inadequately prepared to help clients, leading to poorer outcomes for the very communities they are meant to protect.

The bill also introduces concerning limitations on academic freedom by categorizing topics such as foreign policy and DEI programs as controversial. Faculty would be required to allow students to form their own conclusions on these subjects without the ability to provide educational, evidence-based concepts to prevent misinformation. This restriction undermines the foundation of social work education, which relies on critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and the application of research-driven interventions. The inability of faculty to provide ethical and evidence-based instruction would result in ineffective and potentially harmful practices in the field [2]. Not only does this diminish the credibility of social work professionals, but it also exposes students to liability issues when poor outcomes occur due to inadequate training. The passage of SB 1 would jeopardize the accreditation of Ohio's social work programs. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates that accredited programs promote a well-educated social work profession equipped to advance health, well-being, and justice in a diverse society [3]. By stripping social work education of DEI principles and restricting academic freedom, this bill directly contradicts these accreditation standards. Without accreditation, students will be unable to obtain licensure in Ohio, leading to a significant decline in social work professionals and the dismantling of behavioral health and social work initiatives across the state. Social workers play a vital role in addressing systemic issues such as poverty, mental health, addiction, and child welfare. When social work students are denied comprehensive, research-based education, they enter the field unprepared to meet the complex needs of the populations

they serve, further straining public health and social service systems. Studies have shown that when social workers lack access to evidence-based training and supervision, the ability to provide quality service and care declines causing further destabilization of already under-resourced communities [4]. As research highlights, investment in high-quality social work education and training is linked to better societal outcomes such as reduced crime rates, improved community health, and enhanced economic stability [5]. By limiting faculty's ability to teach evidence-based practices, SB 1 not only harms students but also jeopardizes the well-being of Ohio's most vulnerable residents and the future of the state's social services infrastructure. This bill is more than a threat to higher education but also a direct assault on the well-being of Ohio's most vulnerable residents.

Moreover, the economic and social ramifications for the state are significant. Poorly trained social workers are less effective in reducing homelessness, mitigating the impact of the opioid crisis, and the ability to appropriately mitigate mental health crises [6]. The impacts of these issues mean increased reliance on emergency services, law enforcement, and incarceration. Restricting academic freedom in social work education weakens Ohio's workforce and makes the state less competitive in attracting and retaining skilled professionals committed to public service.

SB 1 represents a direct attack on the integrity of social work education, the well-being of Ohio's most vulnerable populations, and the stability of the state's social service infrastructure. By restricting DEI education and limiting academic freedom, the bill creates a workforce of ill-prepared professionals unable to address complex social issues which leads to increased suffering in marginalized individuals and communities. If enacted, SB 1 will not only dismantle Ohio's social work programs but also disintegrate the very foundation of ethical and effective social services. This leaves countless individuals living in Ohio without the support they desperately need.

## References

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