



March 21, 2024

Dear Senate Higher Education Oversight Committee and House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 6, which propose significant changes to Ohio's higher education system. As a licensed clinical social worker (MSW, LISW-S) and founder of Carve Your Own Path, Inc., a non-profit mental health organization in Ohio, I am deeply concerned about the detrimental impact these bills will have on social work education, our practice, and, most importantly, our clients. Carve Your Own Path, Inc. provides crucial mental health services to a diverse population in Ohio. Our work, in alignment with Social Work practice, is rooted in the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), recognizing that effective social work practice requires understanding and addressing the complex intersections of identity, privilege, and oppression. These bills directly threaten our ability to provide culturally competent and effective care.

Specifically, the proposed restrictions on teaching "controversial" subjects, including DEI, directly contradict the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) accreditation standards. These standards, which have emphasized competency in diversity, privilege, oppression, and intersectionality since 1952, are essential for ensuring that social workers are equipped to serve diverse populations ethically and effectively. SB 1 and HB 6 jeopardize our ability to meet these standards, potentially leading to the loss of accreditation for Ohio's social work programs.

The consequences of such a loss would be devastating. Without accredited programs, graduates would be unable to obtain licensure, creating a severe shortage of qualified social workers in Ohio. This shortage would disproportionately affect vulnerable populations who rely on our services, exacerbating existing disparities in access to mental health care. For Carve Your Own Path, this would mean a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, ultimately hindering our ability to serve our clients.

Moreover, the ban on DEI training and the use of diversity statements in hiring will create a less inclusive and equitable environment within higher education institutions. This not only undermines the value of diverse perspectives in academic discourse but also

limits opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds. It sends a message that DEI is not valued, which will negatively impact the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and students, further perpetuating systemic inequities.

The restrictions on collective bargaining and the addition of full-time faculty to the list of state employees banned from striking further erode the rights of educators and weaken their ability to advocate for their students and their profession. This undermines the principles of shared governance and academic freedom, which are essential for a thriving higher education system.

I urge you to consider the real-world consequences of these bills. They are not merely abstract policy debates; they directly affect the lives of social workers, our clients, and the future of mental health care in Ohio. I implore you to reject SB 1 and HB 6 and instead champion legislation that supports and strengthens social work education and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in our higher education system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Kostura', written in a cursive style.

Amanda Kostura, MSW, LISW-S
Founder & Director
Carve Your Own Path, Inc.
amanda@cyopinc.org
330-426-7885