



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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1 (S.B. No. 1). The Ohio Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (OACES) represents counselor educators and supervisors throughout the state who are dedicated to preparing the next generation of professional counselors. We are deeply concerned that this legislation, as proposed, will jeopardize the education and training of future counselors, create substantial accreditation and licensure barriers, and ultimately harm the mental health services available to Ohioans.

Threat to Accreditation and Counselor Licensure

Counselor training programs in Ohio operate under strict accreditation standards established by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). These standards explicitly require the inclusion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) components in counselor education. Specifically, the *2024 CACREP Standards* require the following:

Section 3: "...Ethical behavior, diversity, equity, inclusion, and critical thinking are integral to counselor preparation and should be infused throughout the curriculum. Diversity refers to all aspects of intersectional and cultural identity...Counselor education programs must document where and in what manner each of the numbered standards listed below is covered in the curriculum."

B. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

1. theories and models of multicultural counseling, social justice, and advocacy
2. the influence of heritage, cultural identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, understandings, within-group differences, and acculturative experiences on individuals' worldviews
3. the influence of heritage, cultural identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, understandings, within-group differences, and acculturative experiences on help-seeking and coping behaviors
4. the effects of historical events, multigenerational trauma, and current issues on diverse cultural groups in the U.S. and globally
5. the effects of stereotypes, overt and covert discrimination, racism, power, oppression, privilege, marginalization, microaggressions, and violence on counselors and clients
6. the effects of various socio-cultural influences, including public policies, social movements, and cultural values, on mental and physical health and wellness
7. disproportional effects of poverty, income disparities, and health disparities toward people with marginalized identities

8. principles of independence, inclusion, choice and self-empowerment, and access to services within and outside the counseling relationship
9. strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination
10. guidelines developed by professional counseling organizations related to social justice, advocacy, and working with individuals with diverse cultural identities
11. the role of religion and spirituality in clients' and counselors' psychological functioning”

Without adherence to these requirements, Ohio’s counseling programs risk losing their CACREP accreditation. This loss would have significant consequences, as graduating from an accredited program is a requirement for professional licensure in Ohio. Without accreditation, graduates may be ineligible for licensure, drastically reducing the number of qualified mental health professionals in our state. Additionally, Ohio joined the Interstate Counseling Compact in 2022, a significant initiative that facilitates cross-state licensure privileges for counselors, expanding access to care. However, Compact participation requires alignment with national accreditation standards. If Ohio programs fail to meet CACREP’s standards, the state could be rendered ineligible to participate, creating unnecessary barriers for Ohio counselors seeking licensure reciprocity and limiting access to care for Ohio residents.

Impact on Mental Health Services in Ohio

Ohio is already facing a behavioral health crisis. According to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), as of 2019, an estimated 41% to 46% of Ohioans in need of behavioral health services were unable to access them. Given this unmet need, we must expand and strengthen our mental health workforce—not impose legislative barriers that will shrink the pipeline of qualified counselors.

SB 1 would hinder our ability to recruit, train, and license professional counselors, worsening Ohio’s mental health provider shortage. If implemented, this bill will not only disrupt counselor education but will directly harm Ohioans who rely on access to competent, well-trained mental health providers.

Conclusion

During the 135th General Assembly, concerns over accreditation led to a provision in Senate Bill 83 (S. B. No. 83) exempting DEI training requirements when they are necessary for accreditation, licensure, or compliance with federal regulations. A similar exemption must be considered for SB 1, or the legislation will create an unnecessary and harmful conflict between state policy and professional education standards.

The Ohio Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (OACES) urges this committee to reject SB 1 as currently written. The bill poses serious risks to counselor education, professional licensure, and the mental health workforce in Ohio. As educators and supervisors committed to ensuring high-quality, ethical, and effective counseling training, we ask that you

prioritize policies that protect the integrity of counselor education programs, maintain accreditation compliance, and uphold professional licensure pathways.

We appreciate your time and consideration on this critical matter and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Chase Morgan-Swaney, Ph.D., LPCC-S, LMHC (WA), NCC, CCMHC, ACS
2024-25 President, Ohio Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (OACES)