

Written-only Opponent Testimony for SB 1

Senate Higher Education Committee Hearing on February 11, 2025

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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.

I know how important Senator Cirino's faith is to him and his loved ones, since I grew up with his family and met him at many family functions. I would like for this committee to take a few minutes to imagine the last moments with a loved one, who is not able to speak up for what they want or need. You or a family member happen to be there to tell their care team that they are very spiritual, a devout Catholic, and need their last rites read to them by a priest before they die. Now imagine that you weren't there to be that advocate, or it is you and all of your loved ones have passed already. The people who happen to be there for those that do not have anyone, tend to be social workers. Our DEI curriculum and instruction includes learning how to interact with and support people of faith, which is critical to being a competent social worker who meets people where they are.

I am currently in school for my MSW and have been for three years. I have been attending school while working hard, full time, and completing my field placement hours. My work has been in supporting people experiencing homelessness and severe mental illness, living fulfilling lives, and becoming self sustainable. I am expected to graduate in May 2026. If SB 1 passes, this would threaten the existence of the social work profession. This bill would take away the possibility of having those important conversations with clients about their spiritual preferences, their cultural beliefs, and make it impossible for us to find a way to be their advocates when no one else is there. This bill passing would go against the NASW Code of Ethics and therefore remove accreditation from Ohio schools, and force students to take their tuition money out of this state and into others. Social workers will not return to a hostile state and therefore, their support for communities will leave ours and be forced to help others outside of our state. Ohio already suffers significantly from not having enough mental health professionals to support our communities and social workers make up the largest portion of mental health professionals. Passing this bill would put our state at a huge detriment and it would be a massive blow to our workforce.

We do not choose social work, social work chooses us. We will always do this work and there is nothing anyone will do to stop us, however legislation like this makes it much more difficult and feels nearly impossible to make the impact we are capable of. I am asking that you vote NO on SB1 and make it possible for us to continue doing this work in our state and allow us to provide the care that Ohio desperately needs.