

December 6, 2022

Members of the Ohio Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Elijah Jones, and I am a licensed independent social worker with supervisory designation in Ohio. I have received my bachelor's and master's degree in social work from the University of Toledo and have been practicing social work for nearly a decade in Ohio. Today, I am writing to testify against HB 509. I believe this bill has good intentions, but long term will hurt the social work profession as well as hurt the marginalized and vulnerable Ohioans that social workers work with every day. Social work is a values-based profession with specific training in understanding human behavior at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of the social environment. Additionally, degreed social workers have participated in structured internships as part of degree programs and must demonstrate skills along the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EAPS) developed by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). While social work draws on psychology and sociology, a degree in anything else does not result in competency of the same skills social work students must demonstrate to graduate their programs.

While I understand amendment is trying to address the behavioral health workforce crisis our state is experiencing, this plan is short-sighted and does not address why individuals are leaving the field or not entering the field. Social workers have significant education and training, and the proposed language would undermine the education, training, and field hours that so many of my social work colleagues have completed to become licensed social workers. Adopting the proposed amendment may also derail the work Ohio has done to become part of the interstate compact. To my knowledge, no other state allows individuals without a degree in social work to become a social worker. Allowing those without social work degrees to become social workers is not the correct move for Ohio.

I urge members of the committee to adopt Senator Antonio's amendment to remove the section of the bill that allows related degrees to be licensed as a social worker in Ohio to protect the public, the profession, and support Ohio's ability to become part of the interstate compact.

Sincerely,

Elijah Jones, MSW, LISW-S