

Written Testimony for Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
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To Chairperson Johnson:

My name is Michel Coconis, Zip Code 43230, and am testifying today on HB509 which includes information about allowing people with any degree being allowed to get licensed and work with the title of "social worker" even when they do not have a social work education from an accredited social work program. Please remove the section related to social work from this bill as it will serve, ultimately, if not immediately, to the public struggling already with getting competent mental health care. In fact, Governor DeWine recently announced several initiatives to improve mental health care for Ohioans, especially youth, and allowing anyone to provide this care is irresponsible. Ending title and practice protection for social workers in Ohio harms social workers and social work students studying to become competent professionals and licensed professionals.

When I was earning my MSW at Ohio State, I was the first person in the U.S. complete a social work practicum/internship at a statehouse and I was placed to work in Senator Marigene Valiquette's (D-Toledo) office who chaired the committee overseeing social work licensure back in 1984. The night when the gavel came down to approve licensure for members of my profession, it culminated **25 years of work by 100s of social workers across Ohio seeking to improve the status of social work that this bill aims to undo**. Since then, the ability to report concerns for professional social workers, which we worked (and still work) to have people understand what social workers do in over 50 settings and levels of practice to help Ohioans of any demographic or intersectional demographics.

I am proud to be a social worker and I have spent 30+ years teaching social work, practicing social work, serving the profession to have people better understand what social work is, does and who we serve throughout society, and researching from a social work lens. Spending a life, doing what is expected, following the rules, and working to help so many less fortunate others make it hard to swallow this unnecessary and potentially harmful legislative change.

Thank you for your time today.