

Opponent Testimony, HB 68

House Public Health Policy Committee

Chair Lipps, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Health Policy Committee, thank you for your time and providing the opportunity to hear my testimony.

My name is Dana Davis, and I am the Chair of the Department of Social Work at Youngstown State University. I am testifying today to express opposition to HB 68 which would have fatal consequences on all Ohioans with behavioral health needs as well as a serious negative impact on the already limited behavioral health workforce in Ohio.

Just this week I was invited to meet with the CEOs of the local children's services organizations for Mahoning and Trumbull counties regarding the shortage of social workers available to provide treatment to children and adults across Ohio. We strategized as to how we can get more social work students into the field earlier and how to retain social work professionals in the field longer. We were all in agreement that social workers are essential workers in serving the mental health needs of our communities which are already abundant and chronic. Any legislation that would add to wait times or have our families seek services from providers without our expertise would be detrimental to the lives of our community members.

Although I am sure that the committee considering this legislation cares very much about the impact specifically to our transgender youth and their families there are also serious consequences to others in our communities. When burdensome and unnecessary steps are required to provide care to transgender youth it means that less time can be spent with other families and community members. With an already overburdened health care system that means that our loved ones that are not directly targeted by this legislation will be indirectly negatively impacted by its passing.

Since gender-affirming care is the standard of practice for social workers not only because it is evidence-based best practice, but also because it is an ethical standard of social work practice, we are required to provide gender affirming care to this important population targeted by this legislation. If this legislation requires further time commitments to the targeted

population services will be directly negatively affected by all populations. When you take make unnecessary and burdensome time commitments to one population, all populations will feel the impact of that decision. It's not like we will suddenly have more providers to deal with the extra hoops involved in navigating the system for this group.

When dealing with acute and chronic mental health issues, especially among our youth, time is of the essence. Anything that further burdens our health care providers time will result in the death of more community members to suicide and overdoses of substance use, which are commonly used to cope with the depths of untreated depression and other mental health concerns. In addition, the untreated mental health of our population along with their use of substances to substitute lack of care will continue to overburden our health care systems including our inpatient and outpatient medical facilities. This will also lead to less attention to all populations by our health care providers.

I ask that you vote no on HB 68 to help protect mental health care for youth, to protect social work ethical practice, and to prevent furthering the limitations of the behavioral workforce in Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Davis', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

Dana Davis, PhD, MSW

Chair, Associate Professor

Department of Social Work

Youngstown State University