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Social-Work Accreditor Assailed in 3 Letters to Health and Human Services Dept.

Three organizations sent letters today asking the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to stop requiring the social workers it hires to have completed their education at social-work programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, unless the council modifies its accreditation criteria.

The three groups — the National Association of Scholars, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education — emphasized slightly different points in their letters. But in general they said that the council's accreditation standards include ideologically skewed requirements, such as a mandate that social-work programs pursue "strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social justice."

Such a standard forces a "progressive" ideology upon students, and it's inappropriate — and a violation of the First Amendment — for the department to implicitly endorse the standard in its hiring criteria, the critics said. The letters said "political conservatives" and "Christians of traditional moral views" would be unable to graduate from social-work programs under those standards, unless they kept their views to themselves, and thus would be unable to get a job in the department's Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

The letters follow a similar message sent last fall to the U.S. Education Department. In that letter, the National Association of Scholars asked the department to investigate whether the social-work council and an equivalent group for teacher education were encouraging universities to evaluate students based on

their commitment to “social justice.”

The controversy stems from the belief among the accrediting groups and officials at schools of education and social work that their students should have the right “disposition” to be teachers or social workers. But some conservative students, backed by national organizations, have characterized the disposition requirement as little more than a litmus test enforced by academic liberals.

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