

**Testimony in Support of SB 322: An Act Concerning the Qualifications of Department of  
Children and Families Employees**

**Select Committee on Children  
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Submitted by: Sarah Chasse, MSW**

As a Masters level social worker, and also having earned my BSW prior to that, I am familiar with the training and background required to hold a degree in the field. As my focus in the master's program was in policy practice, even with an MSW I would not consider myself qualified to practice in a casework or clinical setting. I cannot understand, then, why someone without a social work degree in any area of practice would be an acceptable candidate to fill a position titled "social worker."

There is a reason certain competencies are required to earn a social work degree, and these must be demonstrated on a high level to become licensed in the state. Working with children and families is an art form, and with limited foster placements and diminished state resources, there is little room for error. Most cases under the Department of Children and Families (DCF) care are by nature complex and therefore require specialized knowledge and skills to properly intervene.

Children who enter DCF care have often experienced trauma, have a history of abuse, neglect, and most likely lack a proper support system which builds confidence and coping skills for their peers. Parents whose children become involved in DCF frequently share a similar background, and may lack the skills necessary to help their own children develop properly. These factors contribute to the need for skilled, experienced workers to navigate community systems, analyze family dynamics, and identify individual mental health or emotional issues which require further clinical intervention.

While there may be current DCF workers without social work backgrounds who are capable of meeting the unique needs of these families, it is widely accepted by trained social work professionals who interact with DCF caseworkers regularly that this is unfortunately not the norm. With half to three-quarters of DCF workers lacking a professional degree in social work, this is no surprise. While DCF has an excellent training program for staff, and can enhance the work of even professional social workers through continuing education, it is in no way by itself equivalent to a degree in the field. There are plenty of graduates from social work programs across the state to fill the positions, and this would only help retain our recent graduates whom the state invests in throughout their education.

Nearly all social workers in the private sector are required to have degrees in mental health and often will not be hired without a license, as well. Why should the state have lesser standards? Families who need services deserve to receive them from qualified individuals. A family should be able to reasonably assume that someone who holds the position of "social worker" has the education to support the title, and is therefore qualified to help them. In order to adequately meet the needs of families, all of whom deserve a certain standard of care, and many whose complex

cases require a higher level of expertise, I urge you to require that social workers employed by DCF are professionally trained as such.

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