

Testimony in support of S.B. 322***AN ACT CONCERNING THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EMPLOYEES.***

The Department of Children and Families is charged with the daunting task of ensuring the safety of Connecticut's Children, while at the same time supporting and preserving families when possible. DCF employees regularly make decisions that impact children and their families in the most intimate and profound ways.

The originally proposed language of S.B. 322, An Act Concerning the Qualifications of Department of Children and Families Employees, ensures that DCF employees have the knowledge and skills to make the complex decisions that define their work.

Specifically, requiring that all future hires at DCF have a professional social work degree, either baccalaureate (BSW) or master's (MSW), ensures that all new hires have met national standards of competence as established by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008), the accrediting body for all BSW and MSW programs.

In 2008 the Council adopted ten core competencies that all social work graduates must master. The competencies, augmented by 42 practice behaviors, cover the range of social work practice and are applicable across setting and populations. Schools offering a master's degree in social work must develop additional practice behaviors based on the schools' particular specializations.

The CSWE standards ensure that minimally, both baccalaureate and master's prepared social workers:

- 1—Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.
- 2—Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.
- 3—Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
- 4—Engage diversity and difference in practice.
- 5—Advance human rights and social and economic justice.
- 6—Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.
- 7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
- 8—Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
- 9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.
- 10(a)–(d)—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

The hiring of professionally degreed social workers will:

1. **Improve worker retention, lower costs and facilitate better client care.** Research shows that child welfare workers with social work degrees tend to have stronger intentions to remain employed in child welfare than their nonsocial work counterparts (Ellet, 2006). Similarly, it has been shown that social work education more

effectively prepares workers for child welfare work than other degrees (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993). Retention and preparedness in child protection is important for several reasons.

- a. The costs associated with turnover are reduced (advertising, hiring, and training of employees).
- b. Client services are not interrupted and client safety is positively impacted (Cohen, 2003).
- c. Clients benefit from a workforce that has accumulated knowledge of best practices, family dynamics, community resources and relevant regulations.

2. Improve DCF's public credibility, and practice outcomes.

The population at large trusts degreed professionals to practice in a way that is consistent with professional standards of care, duties and codes of ethics (Ellet, 2006). Experts in the field report that social work degrees are the most appropriate degrees for child welfare practice (Child Welfare League, 2003). A study by the National Association of Social Workers found that degreed social workers feel good about their work, stay in their jobs, feel positively about their supervision, and show concern about resource availability for the children and families they serve (2004).

Social workers with degrees from schools of social work are more prepared to meet the demands of child welfare practice and to engage in practice consistent with the social work standard of care than employees who have had agency based training but not professional social work education. Social workers who are graduates of accredited BSW and MSW programs have had to demonstrate the previously mentioned competencies, all of which will contribute to effective and ethical child welfare practices.

Rittner and Wodarski (1999) examined the relationship between academic preparation of social workers and particular roles within the child welfare system. They found that generalist skills taught in BSW programs prepare students for work as hot-line screeners, foster care case managers, and case workers with low-to-moderate risk families, and to recruit, screen, and train foster and adoptive parents. Skills taught in MSW programs are needed for conducting initial investigations, working with high risk families, terminating parental rights, placing children with adoptive families, and for administrative and supervisory functions.

The original language of S.B. 322, includes both baccalaureate and master's prepared social workers and would support the creation of a workforce able to complete the full range of necessary job functions.

Lastly, as a BSW Program Director, I can speak to the willingness of social work programs to work closely with DCF to prepare graduates who have specialized in child welfare. DCF already serves as a field placement for many, if not all, social work programs in the state. We find there are always more students who are interested in DCF placements than are currently available. Our program, in particular, is prepared to offer a

concentration in child welfare. As a Department of Social Work and Latino Community Practice, we already graduate a significant number of bilingual social workers. Those who also specialize in child welfare would be particularly well prepared to serve Connecticut's children and families as a DCF social worker.

We urge you to pass this bill with an amendment that restores the original language. Connecticut should lead the way in establishing qualifications for child welfare professionals that are consistent with the intensity and seriousness of the work done by DCF.

Thank you.

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