



University of Connecticut
School of Social Work

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Office of the Dean

Testimony in support of S.B. 322
An Act Concerning the Qualifications of Department of Children and Families Employees

In an interview with the newly appointed Head of the Department of Children and Families, Commissioner Joette Katz, spoke for the need to have a child welfare workforce that “could respond to kids and families more quickly and more deeply... and to drag a somewhat shell-shocked workforce of social workers, caseworkers and investigators into the sunlight and help them do their jobs with unrestrained vigor.” (Hartford Courant, February 14, 2011, p.A4). This vision of workforce development will require a concerted effort among the Department of Children and Families and the social work institutions of higher education to provide the necessary skills and knowledge that will increase the number of DCF social workers who will be better prepared to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children, families and communities. The Department of Children and Families will need to hire these workers and support them in the further development of abilities to work with these vulnerable children and families.

The University of Connecticut School of Social Work

The University of Connecticut School of Social Work, with over sixty years of providing social work education to help serve the people of Connecticut, supports the concept and direction of S.B 322. The hiring of individuals with a baccalaureate degree (BSW) or master degree (MSW) in social work for the social work positions in DCF will provide more fully for the needed professionalization of DCF’s social work staff. The present Social Work job classification series (non clinical series), only requires a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in social work or related field (broadly defined) and has allowed non-social workers to be hired by the State of Connecticut for social work positions. Included in this series is DCF social workers. Connecticut has lagged behind other states in the professionalization of their social work staff. S.B. 322 will begin to address this issue.

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Social Work Education and Training

While ongoing training is an important component of effective child welfare practice, most studies have supported the finding that training alone is not enough. Professional social work education, at both the BSW and MSW levels, provides a more thorough and comprehensive exposure to the essential skills and knowledge required for effective child welfare practice. Both BSW and MSW Programs are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and are reviewed every seven years. This review requires that all programs demonstrate that their curriculum ensures competency in ten core areas. These competencies, further articulated by 41 practice behaviors, cover the range of social work practice, are applicable across settings and populations and are advanced by learning in the field agencies and classrooms. Schools offering a master's degree in social work must develop additional practice behaviors based on the school's advanced practice specialization.

Allocation of Public Funds and the School's Mission

The University of Connecticut is one of two public MSW programs in Connecticut. Every year approximately 175 MSW students graduate from UCONN. Approximately, one third of these are students of color and many are bi-lingual/bi-cultural. Included in these numbers are those that are already employees of DCF and have returned to graduate school to pursue this advanced degree. Also included are those who will seek employment at DCF, often having completed their internship at the agency. While the School's advanced specializations prepare students to practice at all levels of the agency, there is a focused curriculum on Women, Children and Families that includes significant content on child welfare policies and interventions. The School's Puerto Rican/Latina(o) Studies Project has played a leadership role with DCF in addressing the needs of Latino(a) families. For over seven years, the School cosponsored with DCF the annual Escuchenos Conferencé, which focused on the needs of Latina(o) children in DCF care. Thus the School is committed and well prepared to work with DCF in educating an MSW child welfare workforce. While the University of Connecticut does not offer a BSW degree, it accepts students from Connecticut's six undergraduate BSW programs and admits them to an Advanced Standing Program, which they can complete in a single academic year. Four of these programs are offered through our State University System. Thus, implementation of S.B.322 would make efficient use of public funds already being spent to support child welfare social work education.

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